

Do Not Go Gentle

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Do Not Go Gentle

by [MojoFlower](#)

Summary

Derek Hale, Beacon Hills Alpha and Dom, wakes up in a dark cell already housing another captive – a mute, traumatized sub with a cruel collar around his neck. His only goal is to get them both free of their brutal circumstances; but even as he tries to get his young companion home, a bond between them grows. Nothing comes easily: danger and harrowing echoes of their ordeal shadow every step they take.

Notes

Trigger warning: please know that there is a rape/noncon scene in Chapter 9. (I will give you plenty of warning.) This is a departure from what I've written before. **There will be a happy ending.** Just mind the tags. If you need more detail, I've made a [post](#) (since it's obviously a spoiler) about exactly what happens. (If you cannot access it, please let me know.)

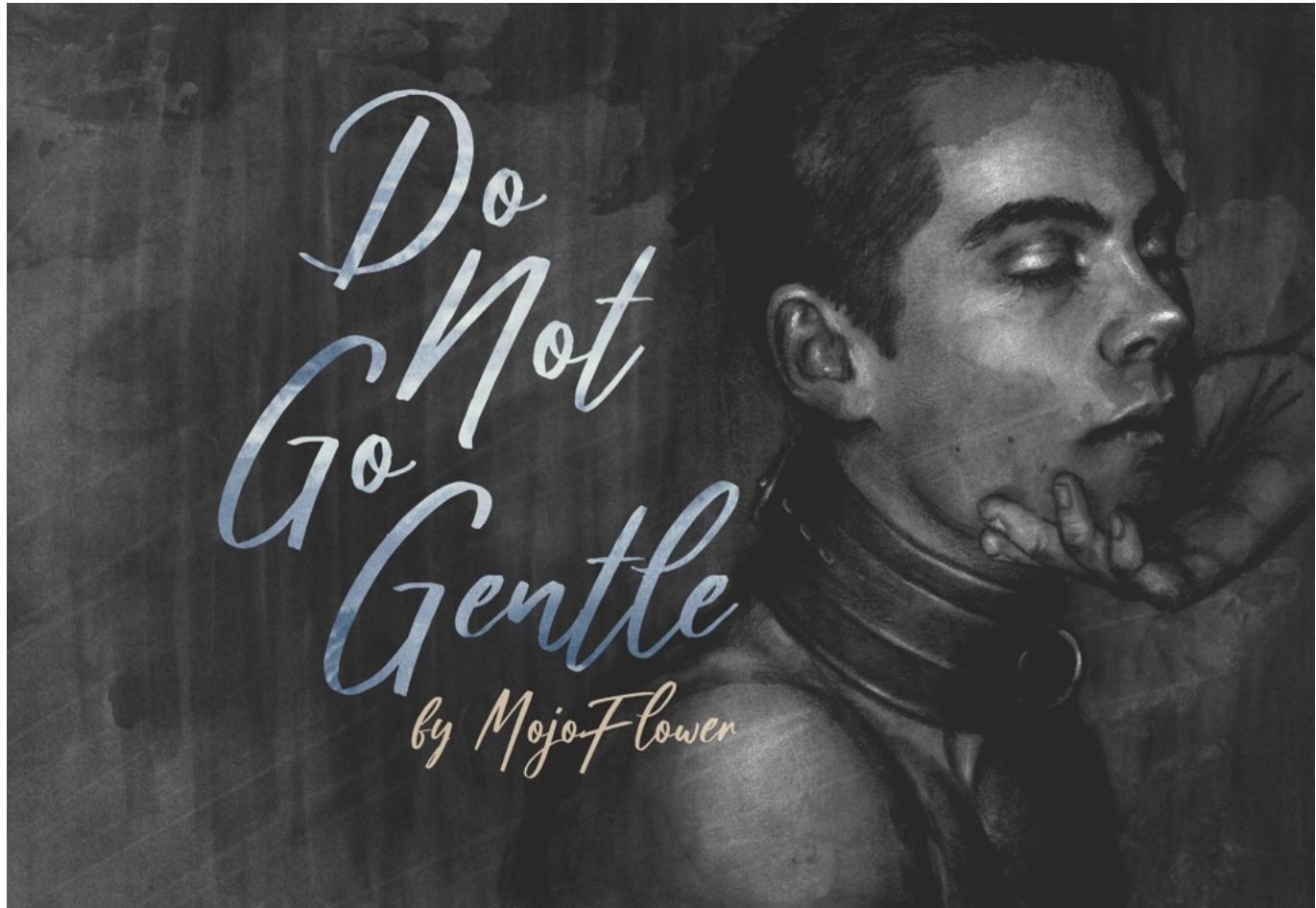
See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Translation into Русский available: [Do Not Go Gentle](#) by [SamWhite](#)
- Translation into Español available: [Do Not Go Gentle \(Traducción\)](#) by [NeriumCicuta](#)
- Inspired by [Don't Speak](#) by [fatale](#)
- Inspired by [That Depends On How You Define Werewolf](#) by [janonny](#)
- Inspired by [Restricted Work] by [placeholder](#)

PART ONE So It Begins

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



PART 1: Captivity

Derek wakes up suddenly. He doesn't open his eyes, doesn't move his body, focuses on keeping his heart rate slow and even, breathing unchanged. He hurts: a sharp pain in one shoulder, throbbing waves of headache cascading over him with each surge of his blood. The other injuries are subsiding, but his body feels like it has been bounced down a rocky precipice, at the least. The skin on his face and shoulders is stiff with tacky blood. He nudges a couple of loose molars back into place with his tongue so they can begin to heal. The taste of blood is thick in his mouth, crusted under his nose. Ugh.

He doesn't know where he is, sorts through the information his senses are giving him. All he can smell is his own drying blood, and beyond that only mildew and damp laid over crumbling concrete. It is cold and humid, feels distinctly subterranean, so he must be in some kind of cellar.

He can hear another heartbeat nearby, fast and irregular, behind him as he lies crumpled on his side on the floor. Except for the low hum of appliances upstairs, he can't hear anything else.

He slits his eyes to the dark, blinks them Alpha-red, and is able to see faint shapes and shadows. He and the other heartbeat are in a small room, he can feel the size of it in the pressure of the stale air, the muted resonance of his breath.

Interesting: he can hear the other heartbeat, but cannot hear breathing.

Derek lies there for another minute, waiting to see if anything will change. He remembers yesterday's fight, now. A group of hunters had jumped him in the Save Mart parking lot. Three or four, he thinks, although his memory is blurry. He had been shot several times (which explains the shoulder), tasered, wrapped in a net of wolfsbane-infused cord, and once he was down, simply beaten until he had lost consciousness. Fuck.

Quick as a thought, he rolls over and launches himself at the second heartbeat, not willing to wait any longer to see what's going on. He follows his eyes and his ears to a slightly darker shadow hunched in a corner, wraps his claws around slim, fabric-covered arms, flips the person over onto their stomach, wrenching their hands into the small of their back. The person under him gasps but doesn't scream, doesn't struggle after the first full-body jerk of a startle. Derek holds both wrists with one hand and wraps his other other around their neck, yanking it back, pricking his claws into delicate skin.

"What is going on here?" he growls menacingly. "Who are you?"

The person under him (the male person, Derek realizes, feeling irregular scruff against his forefinger, the sharp ridge of an Adam's apple) reeks of terror so strongly it penetrates the fug of mildew and old blood. The body under Derek's hot palms quakes, skin clammy and twitching. Derek growls again, tightening his grip, and is rewarded with a choked whimper, quickly stifled. He can hear the man breathing *now*, Derek realizes with satisfaction, harsh gasps straining for air as Derek's fingers slowly choke it off. He hovers over his captive, presses one knee into the small of his back, just under his restrained hands and gives him a little shake. "Answer me!"

There is a pained, panicked little whine, a thread of a sound, but that is all Derek gets. The heartbeat under his hands escalates further, beyond what he thinks should be safe for a human, erratic in both tempo and intensity. Derek is not interested in killing the man via heart attack. Yet. Not until he knows where he is, has more information with which to escape.

He loosens his grip from around the throat, dropping the pressure from fingers to his palm, and realizes that a stiff edge of leather is pressing against the side of his hand. Surprised, he delicately investigates the band: it encircles the individual's neck, locked with a heavy buckle in the back, and a D-ring for a chain or a leash.

"Wait. Are you a sub?" he asks stupidly. He is unsurprised where there is no response.

He has the disconnected thought that this collar is far too tight. He cannot fit a finger between it and the cold skin it cuts into. The man's breathing is so choppy and rapid now it seems he'll hyperventilate soon. Derek moves away a little, releasing his captive and rolling him over onto his back. "Hey—" he starts.

As soon as he is released, the man scrambles away, shoving himself into a ball in the corner, hands held out in front of his face as if to ward off blows.

“Jesus,” Derek breathes. “Listen, pup, I’m not going to hurt you, okay?” He feels faintly nauseous that he’s treated a sub as badly as he already has, and he momentarily regrets attacking blind, although it was a reasonable response given his situation.

Subs are... delicate. Special. To be cared for and cherished, whether they belong to you or not. At least, that’s the way Derek had been raised, although he is aware that there are many in the world who feel that subs are little better than domestic and sexual slaves, tawdry and reviled, nearly viewed as disposable conveniences.

Whatever the reason behind the sub being locked in this room with Derek, whether by his own Dom or another, he clearly hasn’t been treated well. Derek wipes his bloodied nose and mouth against the shoulder of his shirt, cursing the heavy, pervasive odor of iron and dirt that is dulling his sense of smell: anosmia feels more like being blind than actually being in the dark. He reaches forward and takes the man’s hands, icy fingers long and fragile in his own. “Just breathe, okay? I won’t hurt you.”

The man startles back, there is a dull thunk as his head connects with the concrete block walls behind him. Derek ignores it, keeps his hold on those fingers, strokes his thumbs across the delicate skin stretched over bony knuckles. He knows about panic attacks, although he’s never witnessed one before, and he thinks that’s what this is: the miasma of adrenaline and fear, the tachycardia, the ineffective gasps. He is suddenly absurdly worried for this unknown sub, all his Dom instincts vexing at him to fix it, take care of it, make it better. The rasping breaths suddenly begin to choke and gurgle, and the sub jerks one hand free to tear at his collar.

The noise is awful, whimpering and terrified. Derek wants to rip the collar off as well, but knows it is locked, that it will hurt the sub if he were to use his claws or his teeth. He lays his hand firmly across the man’s chest. “*Breathe with me,*” he commands, slipping into Dom voice, eyes glowing red. It is a terrible breach of etiquette to use the voice on a stranger, without consent. But... desperate times and all that.

“Breathe in. Hold it. ... two, three, four. Let the air out. Slowly. ... three, four. Good. Good boy, you’re doing so well.” Chilled fingers suddenly wrap around his wrist and forearm: the sub is clinging to him with both hands. Derek sighs in relief at this small sign of trust. “Let’s do it again. Breathe in. Hold it.”

It takes more than fifteen minutes, Derek crouched protectively over the shivering figure in the corner, coaching him to take in deep breaths. His heart gradually stabilizes, slows down a bit, but his hands still cling tightly to Derek’s forearm. “There,” Derek croons, finally. “There you are, I think we got past it. And you did *so well*. I know how frightened you were, and I’m really proud of you.” All the rewarding praises he’d heard throughout his childhood, from his Domme mother to his sub father fall easily into the darkened room. He wishes he could see the sub’s features, but even Alpha eyesight requires some ambient light for such fine detail.

“You’re such a good boy, you tried so hard.” Derek slides his hand up a leanly muscled chest, over the cruel collar, until one thumb can hook under the man’s jaw and his fingers can sweep up the back of his head, sliding across softly bristled, closely shorn hair. The bones he crosses on the way are so delicate and knobbly that he thinks he must have a youth, rather than a full-grown man, and Derek’s heart lurches to think of an innocent in such a terrible situation.

As soon as Derek’s hand leaves its spot over the boy’s heart and begins to travel, the sub pitches forward with a pained sound, dropping his head against Derek’s chest. “Okay,” Derek said softly,

rubbing his hand on the velvety stubble over a well-shaped head. “Okay, baby. You did *so well*, such a *good job*. Do you need to be closer?” He doesn’t wait for an answer, since it is glaringly obvious, but just leans to the side until his back is pressed against a wall, sitting against it and spreading his legs to make room for the boy to curl between them, keeping his head firmly pressed against his chest.

It takes a few moments to settle them comfortably. The boy is long and lanky, seems to be as tall as Derek, but as small as he wants to huddle, Derek doesn’t want him to be cramped in the morning. Eventually his face presses into Derek’s neck, resting on his shoulder, back supported by Derek’s raised knee while his own knees are pulled in tightly to his chest, shins against Derek’s opposing thigh.

Derek wraps his arms tightly around the sub, holding him close, swaddling and binding him with his body so that he will feel safe and be able to relax. He rubs his cheek against the boy’s head and slowly runs his hands up arm and thigh, across surprisingly broad and bony shoulders, until the hitching breathing smooths out, the convulsive tremors abate and the boy’s heart gradually slows into the distinctive tempo of sleep.

And if Derek uses his thumb to gently smear away the wet remnants of tears, feathering across thick long lashes and testing the slope of the boy’s nose, well, there is no one there to judge him.

Chapter End Notes

Welp. I just jump right in there, don’t I? Who needs a slow build, psht, not I!

The gorgeous cover art is by [lenaospinka](#), whom you should all go check out immediately, and you should [reblog](#) it, too, to give her more exposure, because she’s really *astoundingly talented*.

Many thanks also go to [Domachenkov](#) and [Neverwhere](#), who helpfully cast a raw eyeball over this chapter.

In Which the Cast of Characters Unfortunately Expands

Derek doesn't sleep. Just sits, cradling the huddled sub in his arms, listening for anything that might help him determine what he is dealing with and where he is being held. With the enforced proximity to his companion, he slowly distinguishes the boy's individual scent from the dried blood in and around his own nose. Mostly the kid reeks sourly of pain, stale sweat and fear: testament to many days in this captivity.

He is human, and underneath the miasma of imprisonment he smells young, unclaimed and healthy. So this is not another chapter in a tragic life, but rather a terrible event that has come upon him recently. Derek can scent the hunters on him: oily residue smeared territorially across his hair and neck, redolent of gunpowder and aconite. While it is impossible to *smell* the difference between Dom and sub, Derek has yet to see or hear of a sub hunter – with one glaring exception – and his fingers grow claws when he thinks how helpless the boy would be in a room surrounded by amoral and ruthless Doms.

The quality of the light, or lack thereof, begins to slowly change, and Derek realizes that outside their cell door must be a window, and that dawn is arriving. He sighs and then shifts, rumbling wordlessly deep in his chest in an attempt to ease the sub into awakening. His hands haven't stilled all night, moving steadily across the boy's arm and shoulder, curling around his ankle, drawing him closer to Derek's werewolf body heat. But now, hearing the engine of a car in the distance, he transfers his grip to the boy's neck, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Hey," he whispers. "I think it's morning..."

The body in his arms is *electrified* at the sound of his voice, shocked wakefulness thrumming down every limb. With a vocalized gasp the kid flings himself back, arching his spine and pushing with his legs, struggling to get away.

"Whoa, no," Derek tries to keep his intonation calm and quiet. "No, no. Shhh, baby, shhh." Instinctively he clamps in tighter with arms and legs, stilling the sub's movements, holding him tightly to his own body. "Hush, you're in no danger from me, okay? I'm a prisoner, too."

The sub jerks and fights silently for a few minutes until Derek's words start to seep through.

Derek does not release his grip, but also does not attempt to forcibly calm the sub using Dom voice, worried that such a thing may have happened far too often in the duration of his incarceration, uncomfortably guilty that he's already used it once. Finally, the wildly bucking boy settles down, gradually stilling at the gentle crooning sounds Derek makes under his breath. He is panting and sweaty, but at least he no longer fights.

"I hear them upstairs," Derek says a few moments later, barely louder than a breath. The rattle of keys and slam of a front door are unmistakeable, and heavy boots clomp carelessly across wooden floors over their heads. "Can you tell me what they want?"

The sub's face is scarcely visible, limned in gray light from the crack under the door, and Derek briefly wishes he had more time to look upon it. All he sees at a glance is waxy skin, the sharp jutting bones of cheek and brow framing sunken hollows that evince recent and rapid weight loss. Wide-set eyes stare blindly over his shoulder: the human cannot see anything yet. Derek gives

him an irritated little shake. “Hey, you need to answer me. Who are they. How many. How long have they had you.”

The sub shakes his head, and Derek growls in annoyance, eliciting a shiver and a cringe. He sets the boy aside and stands, pacing back and forth to release his urgency and frustration on something other than his companion.

Derek’s wounds have finally healed; only his torn and blood-crusted clothes attest to yesterday’s violence. There is enough light now to see the room in grayscale: solid concrete walls, a steel door with no handle on the inside. A darkened light fixture is inset into the ceiling, made of drywall and neatly finished. There is a mud sink and toilet in one corner.

If Derek concentrates, he can pick up the heartbeats upstairs, four of them, one much faster than the others, and one with a distinct swishy murmur. There is chatter as well, speaking of general morning things: bitching about Gunner spilling the coffee, pissiness at the heavy fog outside, the thump of shed jackets, the distinctive sound of guns being laid on a table. They do not yet speak of the prisoners in the basement.

Derek runs his hands over the door, pops his claws to see if there is anything to grip, but cannot feel anything, which doesn’t really surprise him. He moves back over to the sub, squats in front of him and grabs his jaw, tilts his head up. “*Tell me about them,*” he Doms. Stymied and on edge, he doesn’t have time to mess around with etiquette, his sympathy for the sub evaporating in the face of immediate threat. “What’s the routine?”

The boy goes rigid at the command, jerks and quivers under the influence of his bidding, but nothing comes out except for a moaning little sigh, the rapid click of teeth, a couple of panted breaths.

This is not normal. No sub should not be able to resist Dom voice. Shouldn’t *want* to. At the urging of a grotesque supposition, Derek unceremoniously pulls the boy’s jaw down and slips two fingers into his mouth. They are immediately met with a pushing wet tongue and frenetic flailing. He pulls his fingers back, trailing across plump lips, fiercely relieved not to have found a stub in lieu of that essential organ. “Can’t you speak,” he demands, puzzled and angry.

The sub swallows and shakes his head. His shoulder is jerking rhythmically, and Derek can smell blood, fresh blood, suddenly. He looks down and sees the boy clawing at his own arm, dragging his fingernails hard across flesh until it tears. Aghast, he puts his own hand on top. “Stop that,” he hisses. “Stop it.” And hates the way the boy quails away from him again. “It’s alright.”

Fuck. Of course he winds up imprisoned with a sub. A mute, a sub, practically a child. He couldn’t have a more useless cellmate. At least he’ll be quiet, Derek supposes. He pulls the boy’s raking fingers away from their damaging work, absentmindedly wiping away the bits of blood before smearing his own hand clean on the seat of his jeans. He sighs before swinging to the side and settling against the wall to wait. Nothing else to do.

A few hours pass. From the conversations overhead, he learns that there are four hunters in the house. Gunner the coffee-klutz, who is a complete asshole, bitching at his companions, often inspired to violent yelling and empty threats; Laxmi, a woman who seems to be in charge, who says little more than *Shut up*; Baron, who is a large man, from the heavy thud of his footsteps, and has said nothing yet; and Rudy, who mostly seems to be a sycophantic echo of Gunner’s grumblings.

There is the expected amount of self-congratulations about capturing an Alpha, and the rustling of paper and pings of booted up devices as they discuss strategies to find the remainder of the pack. It is not until Gunner says he's hungry that there is any mention of the sub, who has crawled back into a corner, curled up tightly and reeking of nervous misery. Derek had briefly wondered if he should go and, for lack of a better word, cuddle; but he really is *not interested* in bonding with any sub, particularly one that seems both underaged and traumatized. The boy isn't currently having a panic attack: there is no need for immediate action on Derek's part, so he stays where he is, sprawled against the wall directly across from the door, waiting.

"Let's get the little bitch," Gunner says. "I'm hungry. What good's a slave if we keep him locked up?"

Baron grumbles his agreement, and Rudy laughs, nasal and short. "If he's still alive," he says. "I doubt the Alpha left much of him to clean up."

Gunner is quiet, thinking for a minute. "Shit," he says. "I didn't think about that. Well, if he's dead, then I'm for sure not cooking or cleaning for you fucks."

Laxmi shifts in her seat, the chair squeaking under her. "You three go check. I don't have to tell you to be cautious, do I? I guarantee that animal's been listening to everything we say and will be ready to attack before you even open the door."

"We got the gas, Miz Laxmi," says Baron. His delivery is deep and resonant, flavored with the slow lilt of the Deep South. "Won't be a problem."

Derek listens to another door open and then the hollow sound of boots on an open staircase. The scant glow under the door becomes suddenly brighter: someone's turned on a light. They travel to the basement and troop over to the door that cages Derek.

"Yo, Stiles, you still alive in there? Big bad wolf eat you up?" Gunner is sharp and sarcastic.
"Alright, wolfy. Better hold your breath." There's the hissing from a gas canister and Derek can smell aconite, other chemicals: a viscous, oppressive weight to the air. He does hold his breath, manages to suppress his instinctive growl for several endless minutes, eyes lit and red.

The sub... *Stiles*?... cowers in the corner, face utterly ashen, heaving in panicked gasps. He looks over at Derek, helpless and afraid, a high thin whimper his only sound.

"Hold your breath," Derek growls, but the boy just shakes his head. Derek clenches his fists, but doesn't move. He debates getting closer to the door to fight, but thinks the gas may be stronger there. He has never dealt with a situation like this before.

Rudy speaks up in the subtle slurring and vowel shift of a Chicago native. "Maybe the wolf didn't eat the boy, huh? Maybe he's just been fuckin'm." He bangs a couple of times on the door and shouts, "D'ja do that, you fucking animal? Dom him to his knees? You had a lot of time. I bet you was drilling his filthy little hole, huh?"

"Oh, gross," Gunner complains. "That's so fucking disgusting, I don't even want to think about it. Maybe we should just kill the kid as a mercy. Nobody needs a dog dick in their ass."

Derek drags his claws along the cement behind him, feels one spear into a small irregularity. He is reaching the limit of his lung capacity. Even without respiring he can taste the gas in the air, much more concentrated now. His claws recede as the wolfsbane forces him to shift fully human.

Stiles contorts in a rasping cough, waving his hand through the air in front of his face as if that will help.

"I'm not cleaning up if that room is a bloodbath," Gunner grumbles. Derek nearly rolls his eyes. This guy seems obsessed with avoiding chores. "But twenty bucks says they're both still alive. Why would an Alpha bother taking out a fucking *sub*, huh?"

"Who gives a shit either way, you jackass," Baron says. "And no reason why you should. Not like anyone'll be in there long anyway."

"We've got to wait for Mr. Willis," Gunner grumbles. "Could take *weeks*, and I wanna keep my fucking slave while we gotta stay in this fucking backwater." He kicks the door. "You still awake in there, you werewolf piece of filth? Naptime yet?"

Baron snorts derisively. "You really think he's gonna answer? Dumbass."

Derek's seeing spots in front of his eyes, digging his claws in desperately to prevent himself from inhaling. It doesn't work for long, and with a despairing gasp, he sucks the contaminated air into his lungs. The effect is immediate: a caustic pain in his nose and throat, the seizing of his lungs as if calcified. It's like inhaling Tabasco, and cold sweat and goosebumps break out over his skin as he struggles to stay upright.

The sub remains standing, pressed in the corner, face crumpled as if he is about to cry. In spite of the coughing, it is clear the gas doesn't affect humans with the same toxicity. Derek falls to his knees in minutes, doubled over, lungs laboring and seizing in turn.

This feels like drowning.

It is suddenly unbearably bright: they have flipped on the overhead light from outside the room. The door flies open before Derek's eyes can even adjust, and Derek leaps forward with a growl. Well, that is his intention.

What actually happens is that he staggers slowly up with some degree of forward momentum, hand bracing himself shakily against the wall. A giant bearded viking of a man laughs at him, and Derek suddenly feels the instant jolt and burn of a taser. He paws at the spot over his heart where the taser bit, but coordination is a memory from the past. His vision is hazy now, and he convulses with each new buzzing strike.

A thin man pretentiously dressed in a cowboy hat and spurred boots weasels through the door behind the giant and points at the kid. "Lookit, Rudy. Alive *and* still dressed. You owe me \$20."

"What stopped you, Alphie?" Rudy derides. "Neutered? No balls for killing? Can't even fuck a sub?"

Derek attempts a growl, but he's too weak.

"Crawl on outta there, you sub piece of shit."

Derek, face now flat on the floor, has become so woozy he can barely see Stiles from the corner of his eye as the boy grinds his teeth and shakes his head.

“*Crawl!*” Gunner Doms. Stiles shudders from head to foot, and Derek sees his knees wobble, but he shakes his head again, fingers clawing once again at the scratched up skin of his forearm, tearing away nascent scabs.

Rudy, a stocky young man with homemade tattoos and patterns carved into sandy hair, steps forward and begins to chant with Gunner, both wielding Dom voice like a lash, “*Crawl. Crawl. Crawl.*”

Derek's last sight before everything turns black is Stiles dropping brokenly to his hands and knees, neck bared.

Torture 101

Chapter Notes

Happy International Fanworks Day, my friends! What a happy coincidence. Also, thank you so much for all of your enthusiasm. Your comments, kudos, subscriptions (494?????!!!!) and bookmarks mean the WORLD to me, and it's so encouraging to be reassured that y'all are enjoying my work. The number of you who are already drawn in and following simply leave me astounded. Here's another chapter for you, beta'd by the lovely [Domachenkov](#).

*A bad guy uses 'retard' as an insult in this chapter. It doesn't seem to merit a tag, but here's your warning, in case it's a trigger for you.

Derek wakes up oddly vertical, head slumped over his collarbones, arms twisted out and up from his shoulders. His nose tells him he's still in the basement, but no longer in the cell. There are three heartbeats in the room, one quickening as a woman says, "He's up, Rudy. Give him a tickle."

Derek snaps his head up, teeth bared and snarling. The room he is in is unpleasantly illuminated with buzzing fluorescent tubing. Everything is dingy gray and dilapidated: walls, floors, ceiling. Two hunters sit at a small table less than five feet in front of him. The woman has both elbows planted on the scarred surface, hands clasping a mug of coffee just under her chin. Her gaze is assessing, veiled through gently rising steam. The tattooed man next to her scrubs his fingers through hair cut into a flattop, and Derek focuses for a hyperaware moment on vivid and unimportant details, like the geometric patterns shaved above his ears and the smear of shaving cream on the twisted collar of his camouflage shirt. He smiles, oily and *anticipatory*, and Derek snaps his teeth in impotent challenge.

The sub kneels silently on the floor near the man.

Stiles. The sub is named Stiles and the man's name is Rudy, Derek recalls through the post-gas soup that is his brain.

Rudy kicks his chair back as he rises, shoving it aside with his foot so that it skids across the floor and topples over Stiles, who has cringed away. The woman, who must be Laxmi, rolls her eyes before shifting her calculating stare back to Derek. "Go on, Rudy," she orders impatiently.

Rudy struts over to a black box, it looks like some kind of car battery, and begins to connect booster cables between the battery and the heavy wire fencing Derek has been bound to. Derek heaves and yanks, trying to escape, but the manacles binding him to the fence are sturdy and he is still groggy and feeble. As Rudy smugly allows the final clamp to bite around the wire, current zings through Derek, and suddenly his convulsing is entirely involuntary. His fangs drop, eyes bleeding red as the beta shift sweeps over his body. He spasms, unable to take a breath, muscles locked in prolonged contraction.

Rudy's tongue swipes around his lips and he slowly twists a dial, grossly lascivious and brazenly avid for Derek's suffering as the current escalates. Laxmi, in contrast, is entirely indifferent.

If Derek could scream, he would. Shameless and enraged, he would howl. If Derek could curse, he would. Instead, after agonizing minutes of electrocution, his eyes roll back into his head and he is enveloped in darkness.

He's not unconscious for long, he knows.

Laxmi's husky chuckle is the first thing Derek hears once Rudy dials the electricity back. There's still a low level current running through his body, preventing him from shifting out of beta-form, preventing him from healing where his seizing has torn his teeth through his lip. Blood runs fresh from his wrists, raw and gouged under the cuffs, to drip from his elbows. He fights to focus, countering the residual rolling of his eyes, and Stiles' horrified face swims slowly into view.

Derek doesn't know if the horror is due to witnessing torture or to the fact that he's now visibly a werewolf. It seems likely that Stiles would have had no idea they existed. Although that begs the question of *why he's here at all*.

Laxmi rises, drawing his attention. She's tall and lean, vaguely Indian, dark hair cut at a sharp asymmetrical angle near her cheekbones. She wears a black tank top and military pants and boots. She's clearly strong and experienced, radiating confidence and authority.

She stalks over to wrap her hands in Derek's shirt, careless of dried and fresh blood in the material, and twist it, pushing him sharply backwards into the chain link with her fists. "All that power," she muses, watching the involuntary flexing of his muscles. "If we put you animals on wheels like hamsters, we could power cities." She pulls back and spits on him; he can feel the warmth from the dripping gob quickly fading over his collarbone. He stares back at her, deadpan, and ignores the slow slide of saliva and mucus to crack his neck, tilting his head insolently from one shoulder to the other.

The door crashes open before she can do anything else, and Gunner and Baron push through. Derek makes note of the stairs behind them, the sole escape route, hoping to use it sooner than later. Gunner pulls off his cowboy hat as he passes Stiles, still huddled on the floor next to the knocked-over chair. He casually swats the boy in the face with it, not pausing to look for a reaction. Stiles only blinks and ducks his head further, pulling his shoulders in as if that will make him a smaller target. Baron moves to stand behind Laxmi, and Gunner narrows his eyes at Derek from over Rudy's shoulder.

"Aw, look," he drawls. "Little puppy couldn't get free, huh?" He picks Laxmi's coffee up from the table and suddenly whips the entire mug at Derek's face, where it breaks across his nose and cheekbone, hot coffee mixing with blood to slide down his neck. Although Derek doesn't react beyond a red-eyed glare and low growl, the sudden, sharp pain is bewildering, on top of the electricity running through his body. Derek struggles to breathe, to give nothing away.

Rudy flails in shock as the mug goes whizzing by his head, and turns toward Gunner to shout, "Fuck you, man, what you doing?"

Gunner just laughs, clapping the ludicrous hat back on his head. "Nothing. Having a little fun, is all."

Laxmi steps back distastefully from the shattered mug and pooled coffee on the floor. “Clean it up, Gunner,” she says coldly. “I have work to do, and now you’ve made a mess right where I want to stand.”

Gunner makes a face, and Derek manages to smile unpleasantly at him, in spite of the surge of nausea that arises when Laxmi says she has ‘work to do’. That can’t mean anything good for Derek. But watching Gunner unsuccessfully dodge a chore, after all his complaints, is some small recompense.

“Wait, no way,” Gunner whines. “That’s what we’ve got this little freak for.” He spins around to kick at Stiles. “Clean that shit up right now, you hear me? Crawl your skank-ass over there and lick it up.”

“He can’t lick up a *broken cup*,” Baron says, exasperated. “You’re a fucking retard.” He moves to a counter against the wall and picks up a roll of paper towels, pulling a wad of them free. He shoves them towards Gunner, “Here.”

Gunner wastes no time in dropping them in front of Stiles, and then directs the sub on his way with another rough kick to the boy’s rear end. He Doms, “*Go! Gee-up, you little shit.*” It looks almost as if Stiles is about to shake his head when, “Yeah,” Rudy taunts, also Domming. “*Clean after your betters. Fucking hole.*”

Derek watches the boy lean forward until he’s on hands and knees, paper towels clutched in one hand. He crawls across the room as if in a stupor until he is nearly under Derek’s feet, swiping at the mess on the floor. He stacks broken ceramic into one hand and soaks up liquid with the other. A dribble of blood falls from Derek’s elbow to the kid’s forearm, but he doesn’t even flinch, doesn’t wipe it off.

When the floor is clean, Stiles shuffles on his knees to the small wastebasket behind Baron and drops everything in. He kneels again, looking up, seeking out the Doms who ordered him, and for a moment his face is stretched into lines of yearning, the instinctive need for approval echoed in the tension of his body.

He gets nothing from them, of course.

Laxmi shoos everyone from the room except for Baron, telling Rudy and Gunner to make the sub useful and get the kitchen tidy and fix some damn sandwiches. Then she and Baron turn back to Derek. “So. *Alpha Hale.* Tell us where the rest of your pack is.” She doesn’t smile or make a big deal out of it. Just crosses her arms and waits.

“Fuck. You.” Derek grits out, jerking again at his bonds.

Laxmi just nods and tips her head at Baron. “All right, then,” she says. “I’ll let Baron ask you.” The big man meets Derek’s eyes impassively for a moment, and then turns to open a damn giant toolbox on the workbench along one wall. He lights a small propane torch with a *crack* of the striker that seems to echo through the room.

Derek closes his eyes. He predicts it’ll be a long fucking day.

When Stiles finally returns, Derek has already been in the cell for several hours. He's still slowly healing from the wounds Baron and Laxmi inflicted, cuts and burns all along his arms and chest, but it's a damn sight better than it had been when they'd first knocked him out and taken him back. He theorizes that the aconite-infused gas is inhibiting his healing even after the fact.

Propelled through the door by a violent shove, Stiles staggers in, trips over one of his feet and sprawls on the ground. Derek hears Gunner and Rudy locking the door and then laughing as they troop back up the stairs. The sub lies where he's fallen for a moment, kind of gasping and wheezing, body shaking. His shirt has gone missing, and Derek can see red marks and bruising across his shoulders and back from whatever violation those hunter assholes could think to dish out. His eyes flash and he growls in anger at the blatant exhibition of abuse. He knows there's a large proportion of humans who have problems with male subs, who think it's unnatural and goes hand in hand with homosexuality. Wolves don't have that issue; as their sexuality is relatively fluid, they've always been perplexed by the rampant homophobia in some of their human counterparts.

It is a full minute before Derek manages to rein in the wolf's fury at the mistreatment of an innocent and softly say, "Hey. Stiles."

The boy looks up after a long delay. He has a bleeding cut across his cheek and a fat lip, and his expression is lost, dazed and hurt. He makes a thin whimpering sound and brings one shaking hand up to wipe at his cheek. Derek is not sure if he's glad they left the light on: it might be better *not* to see the wreck they've left the boy in. "Are you okay?" he asks. Which is stupid, because the boy clearly isn't.

He can see the precise moment when Stiles remembers that he'd wolfed out on the fence, that he's a monster. The poor kid scrambles away, pressing his back into the far corner and staring wildly around the room, both fists up near his face to ward off attack. His thumbs are tucked inside his clenched fingers, and Derek closes his eyes against the strange swoop in his gut induced by that bit of naïveté.

He sighs. Loudly. "I'm not going to hurt you, you know. I'm sure if you thought about it, you'd be able to figure out who the real monsters here are." Derek stops himself for a moment, tries to filter the impatience from his tone. He rubs his hand across his jaw, and the rasp of bristles against his palm makes him feel strangely loutish. "I'm not human, yeah. And I'm sorry you had to find out about it this way. But these assholes kidnapped and hurt me, just like they're doing to you. Right? So you should know that you're *safe* with me."

Stiles doesn't answer, of course, but his fists relax a bit, and he drops his head onto his knees, hiding his face.

It's silent for a while, Derek trying to give the kid some privacy by staring up into a corner. It's hard to ignore the erratic beating of his heart, though, the nearly constant shivering, the desperate and nearly successful attempt to become invisible by making his breathing utterly silent. Derek nearly chokes on the heavy scent of pain and fear and exhaustion, and can't stop frowning.

He eventually stands up, mostly healed, and moves over to the mud sink. He drinks thirstily from his hands, ignoring the metallic taste of the icy water: half of what he's drinking is his own reconstituted blood, no doubt. He pulls off his shirt, which had only been a thin, ribbed tank top to start with and is now pretty much in rags after Laxmi and Baron had had their fun. He

optimistically turns on the H tap and is entirely unsurprised when nothing turns hot, or even warm. He rinses his shirt as well as he can and then uses it to lave at his face, arms and torso. He sticks his head under the tap as well, scrubbing his hair as clean of blood and dirt as he can before shaking out the excess water.

After rinsing out the pathetic bit of fabric, he turns around to find Stiles peering up at him from lash-latticed, warmly brown eyes. Derek lifts his shirt a little in offer. "Want me to—" he indicates his own cheek.

Stiles doesn't answer, but he doesn't shy away when Derek slowly approaches him. The boy smells of stale sweat and the over-sweetened coffee soaked into the knees of his jeans. Derek wipes gently at the cut on his cheek, and then, when the boy shows no resistance, wipes his hands as well, cleaning away sticky coffee from that morning, and all the gummy dirt from the floors they'd made him crawl across. The long-fingered hands are limp in his own, and Derek takes his time, going down to the webbing between each finger, brushing a corner of damp fabric under ragged nails.

The boy's feet are bare, vulnerable and icy, and Derek's lips are pressed into a tight line as he cleans them, taking as much care as he can with the cold rag of his shirt.

"Do you want to wash up some more?" he asks quietly, pleased that the sub... *Stiles*... has relaxed a bit, that the reek of fear is a stale smell, not fresh. "Need to use the bathroom? Here, I'll turn my back to give you some privacy." Derek doesn't wait for an answer, just leaves the shirt in Stiles' hands and wanders to the corner furthest away from the facilities. He stares at the wall, arms crossed over his chest, and listens to the heartbeat behind him.

It takes about five minutes for the boy to start moving, but he finally does. The splash of urine in the toilet is accompanied by the stinging odor of ammonia denoting dehydration, and something vaguely pharmaceutical that makes Derek wonder what drugs the kid was on before he was kidnapped. Water runs in the sink, and there's some splashing that means Stiles is trying to get a little more clean, and thankfully drinking some water.

It's easy to track the kid, as he shuffles back over to his corner and slumps down to the floor. When Derek turns around, he sees his shirt neatly rinsed and hanging over the edge of the sink, and he almost smiles at the poignant effort to nest.

Derek relieves himself as well, clearing his throat in warning to the sub, who ducks his head between his knees again. When he's washed his hands and dried them a bit on the shirt-now-towel he heads back over to his own side of the room and slides down the wall until he's sitting, wrists dangling over his knees. He tilts his head towards the ceiling. "Are they going to turn that light off?"

Stiles looks at him quickly before his eyes skitter away. He shrugs, which Derek takes to mean the lighting schedule is unpredictable. He knows it's shortly after 9pm, because there's a clock upstairs that dings the hour. He sighs and closes his eyes. Might as well sleep.

Subdrop and a little bit of Stiles' POV

Chapter Notes

Can I just say how much your comments and kudos mean to me? Y'all are the best, and I want to give each one of you a bright, happy daffodil. Especially [domachenkov](#), who, as always, is a fabulous beta. POV change in the middle of this chapter (sorry!). You'll finally get to hear a little about Stiles' experience. Please enjoy, and have a lovely Leap Day. (Leap Year Day? Bissexus?)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Derek startles out of sleep to the cacophony of the clock upstairs chiming midnight and groans. The overhead light is still on, unremitting and casting harsh shadows. Stiles is awake, heart fluttering in his chest, breathing jagged, too fast and underlain with tiny whines. His eyes are open, but unseeing, and the smell of fresh blood blooms in the still air of the room. He is tearing at his arms again, dragging across cuts he's made himself, digging his fingernails punishingly into the delicate, vein-mapped skin below his wrist.

Derek springs across the room before he's really had a chance at rational thought, crouching next to the troubled sub and grabbing his hands, holding them away from his bleeding arms. "Stop! What are you doing?" he breathes incredulously. "Stop it!"

Stiles moans but continues to strain against Derek's hold. He is filmy with cold sweat, covered in goosebumps, and he shivers violently. He looks straight through Derek. He's completely pitiful, is what he is, and all of Derek's instincts, both as a Dom and as an Alpha are triggered to comfort and protect.

He slides down the wall, pulling Stiles over one thigh to huddle him between his legs.

After casting a critical eye over Stiles' sluggishly bleeding arms, Derek instinctively binds the boy, trapping his wrists firmly, clamping his legs around the slender body, wrapping his other arm around Stiles' shoulders, hand hard on his neck before moving to the crown of his head to press it down into his own shoulder. Stiles isn't a werewolf, but this position isn't just for scenting; it is purely for the comfort of a sub, offering him a place to hide and recover.

The boy ceases to struggle once his head is buried in Derek's shoulder. He remains clammy and shaking for a long while, before slowly growing more lax. Closing his eyes and allowing himself to sink into the boy's scent, Derek contemplates the kind of day he must have had: Dommed into many different humiliating tasks, abused at the whim of his de facto Doms, never given praise or aftercare. The fact that he's being Dommed against his will is irrelevant to his needs as a sub.

What matters is that he's spent all day either fighting against or trying to please his Doms: his hormones have to be seriously out of whack and subdrop is practically inevitable.

Derek has never had a serious commitment to a sub; he's hooked up for one-time scenes at clubs or coffee shops, had multiple flings in University, but nothing that's lasted longer than a few months.

The subs he's been with were all mentally healthy, not looking for any more commitment than Derek was willing to offer, and typically had a stable Dom or Domme in their life already.

This kid is so young that Derek can only imagine his regular Dom must be a parent or other family member, and he doubts very much that the kind of scenes they'd get up to would in any way echo what's been happening in this godforsaken hunter hellhole. He knows the kid's tried to fight it, had several times noted him struggling to resist: shaking his head, turning away from a command.

He's very strong, really. It's not often a sub needs a dual Dom tag-team to coerce submission and compliance. Which would make it that much harder for Stiles to regain his equilibrium, of course, when he finally emerges from non-consensual subspace.

These hunters are hurting Derek, yes. But it is straightforward and simple torture: painful and scary, but also very easy to cope with. In other words, there is no side of mind fuck.

So in spite of the risk of forming a bond, Derek can do no less (and still live with himself every day... assuming he survives long enough to be encumbered with theoretical future regrets) than provide the care that Stiles so manifestly requires. Clearly the boy has a predisposition to bond with him; from even the first night, when he'd had the panic attack, Derek had been able to soothe him and talk him down. Their connection is awkward, but the compatibility is undeniable. And if Derek were to admit it, only to himself, he finds he yearns for the boy to submit to him. He will have to be careful and hold himself back, monitor himself to ensure that he doesn't force a bond.

So he holds Stiles tight, immobilized, surrounds the distressed sub with his warmth and scent, and helplessly gives in to his instinctive need to provide the aftercare that Stiles craves.

“You did so well today, Stiles,” he murmurs into the softly bristled hair tucked under his chin. “I know how difficult that was for you, how hard you fought. I watched you all day, and I'm *so proud*, baby. You did everything right, just like I wanted you to.”

Derek has to stop and swallow down bile, because he *hates* what those assholes had made Stiles do, wants to tear out their throats with his *teeth*, wants to Dom *them* to their knees. He burns with a visceral need to make them crawl through glass and acid, to tear their fucking skin off their bones in long narrow strips, twist it into rope and *hang* them from it until they bleed out. He clenches his hands into fists and then deliberately relaxes them, finger by finger. When he speaks again, he doesn't allow his internal violence to be revealed in his voice.

“I know how hard you fight it, sweet boy.” Derek smooths his hand around to Stiles' cheek, lays it over the slight swelling and heat of the wound there, slowly pulling out the pain in a narrow tracework of blackened veins up his arm. To Derek, the discomfort it is but a mild malaise, made negligible in the transfer, but Stiles sighs softly and relaxes incrementally more. Derek moves his hand around to Stiles' bared back, skimming carefully over the dramatic taper from surprisingly broad shoulders descending to narrow ribs that poke through thin skin. The pain here is more intense, from having been hit and kicked and punched throughout the day as Stiles crawled at the hunters' bidding. Derek grits his teeth. He cannot stop his eyes from flaring in rage, fangs crowding his mouth, and it takes a moment before he can suppress the wolf.

“Look how brave you were,” he croons gently, instead of raging through the cell, punching concrete. “You didn't even cry, did you, my good boy.” He knows that's true. The boy's eyes are drawn with stress and exhaustion, but not swollen; nor can Derek smell the tell-tale saliferous odor of tears. His arms reek of blood, however, just as his entire body broadcasts the mordant scent of fear, acrid self-disgust and a wild kind of dissociation that means he is anchorless and drifting.

Derek noses along Stiles' temple until the boy obligingly rolls his head back against Derek's shoulder, no longer hiding in the crook of his neck. "Good boy," he breathes. "You obey me so well. I know you're afraid and you're tired," he straightens the kid's lax body until it lies back against his chest, keeping him carefully cradled between his legs. "I know how hard this is for you," Derek instinctively nuzzles the tender skin behind the hinge of his jaw, "and I just want to know how impressed I am with how well you're holding up. With how strong you are."

The kid shudders a little against him as Derek breathes this quiet praise into his skin; Derek can feel the swift run of goosebumps flare and vanish under his palms and wide-spread fingers. Derek exhales sharply, and the puff of humid air in Stiles' ear induces yet another shiver, a tiny, muffled whimper. Stiles' eyes are tightly closed, and he pushes his body a bit harder back into Derek's chest.

"I'm going to help with your arms," Derek says next, after giving them both a few minutes to nestle against one another and simply steep in the basic, animal heat and comfort they each offer. Stiles hardly twitches when Derek lifts one softly bent arm to his lips. "This is something my mother would do for us," he explains. "It will help you to heal faster." Stiles doesn't appear to care, hardly reacts until Derek actually opens his mouth around the scratches on his arm. Then he startles, but Derek soothes him with a rumbling growl, using his free hand to draw out the last remnants of pain. Stiles melts back into docility with a vibrating, unvoiced murmur, as the endorphins in his body induce a sedative kind of euphoria in the wake of all the small injuries. So Derek continues, lapping at the ferrous viscosity of the sub's blood, sensitive tongue tracing the raised edges of torn skin and bathing it with the healing properties of werewolf saliva.

With Stiles so pleasantly yielding under his hands, Derek can guide and position him however he likes in order to access his wounds. The gingery scent of the boy, lacing through pain and fear,mingles with the flavor of his blood, until Derek has unwittingly formed a sense-memory, as though he'll now have olfactory and gustatory receptors keyed specifically to Stiles. Now Derek's very body, in addition to wilder, deeper senses that he won't yet name, will recognize the sound of Stiles' rabbiting heart, the sight of lambent cola eyes and dotted skin, the fine-grained texture of him under Derek's lips and tongue.

Stiles warms up as Derek works over him, goes heavy and slack against his chest and shoulder. He begins to smell pleasantly of contentment and, as Derek licks and sucks, tantalizingly *ripe*. Derek drops his arm and breathes deeply, mouth parted to enhance the piquant aroma of a well-tended sub.

Derek scents him without consciously deciding to, rubbing his nose and jaw against Stiles' face and neck until his skin is tenderized a soft pink from Derek's whiskers. His body has gone entirely pliant under Derek's ministrations, and before the clock strikes 2am, Stiles is peacefully sleeping. Derek holds the boy until he feels like he belongs there, feels like *property*, a *treasured possession*, and Derek tries not to wonder what kind of additional damage he's doing to this poor innocent. Jesus, Stiles hadn't even known what werewolves *were*, and now he is becoming deeply enmeshed with one.



Stiles wakes in the morning only slightly cramped and blissfully warm. He feels peaceful and languid, strangely sated, and his first fuzzy thought is that whatever he did last night masturbating was *fantastic* and he needs to do that on the regular. But reality catches up with him quickly, and before he's even opened his eyes, he remembers where he is.

He lurches forward with a gasp, pushing away from the heavy arms that cage him in, taking in the rude blaze of the fluorescent lights, the gray block wall and rusted mud sink ahead of him.

The arms close in more tightly, pinning him in place, and there's the startling sensation of scraping stubble across the nape of his neck as the person behind him jolts awake as well.

"Stop. Little sub. Stiles. Shhh, what are you doing?" The voice is husky with sleep and a little confused. Stiles obediently stills, even though the man isn't using Dom voice. He suddenly remembers the night before, the man crooning praise and somehow stroking away all Stiles' aches and pains. He looks at his forearms, pinkened with partially-healed parallel scratches. Did that man *lick* them last night? Stiles makes a face...ugh... and then wonders if he'd been scratching *himself*. He slowly drags his fingertips across a series of furrows and frowns at the perfect match. It must have been a panic attack, although he doesn't think he's ever hurt himself like that during one before. Well. Not as if he isn't in an unprecedented and uniquely stressful situation.

His eyes fly to the door, wondering when those men might come back. Their schedule has been erratic at best.

Stiles hadn't been afraid of them when they'd first forced his Jeep off the road on the way home from school. Two stoners, he'd thought, or perhaps drunks. He'd jumped (or you know, maybe *fallen*) out of his car filled with righteous indignation because their poor driving skills had left scrapes all along the side of his precious Roscoe. But then they'd emerged from their SUV bearing handguns.

Like a dorky movie extra, one man, wearing a black suede cowboy hat, spun an old-school, pearl-handled Smith & Wesson revolver on his forefinger. The other man, who looked more inner-city-white-boy than middle-aged hee-haw, held a Glock 19 down by his thigh. (Yes, Stiles knows guns. He may not be allowed to *shoot* them, but that doesn't mean he hasn't educated himself thoroughly in an effort to convince his dad that he's ready for that kind of responsibility.) He'd have laughed if he weren't so stunned.

In that first moment of confused shock, he'd been summarily grabbed, one man on each arm, and the soft cotton minor's collar he wore was ripped from his neck to flutter to the road as he was shoved into the back of their vehicle by Cowboy, who then climbed in next to him.

Stiles didn't even have time to scream.

He'd argued with them for a good portion of the ride, in spite of a lively terror which had his skin prickling and cold sweat collecting in his armpits and palms. Who did they think they were, what were they doing, couldn't they find any better sport than an underaged sub for god's sake. The city boy, who was driving, turned at a red light and smacked him hard across the temple with the body of his Glock, and Stiles hadn't said anything after that, sagging dizzy and confused as far away from Cowboy's air of eager menace as he could. Eventually Stiles curled up against the window, staring through misted glass as Beacon Hills gave way to endless, dark country roads. The drive seemed to take hours.

When they got to their destination, Stiles jerked out of the semi-trance he'd slipped into. They were at an isolated old house, and the two men quickly dragged him from the SUV and across a weedy gravelled drive. He was more or less drop-kicked down the basement stairs and impelled into a corner room with no further comment. The men locked the door and left him there to stew in his uncertainty and anger. And fear.

Because let's be real. Stiles was *very* afraid.

When he was fetched again, much later, it was by a giant Nordic bear of a man, who expressionlessly grabbed him by his upper arm and hauled him back up the stairs to the kitchen. There was a woman waiting there, as tall as Stiles and disconcertingly pretty in an exotic, dangerous way, toying with a stiff leather collar she held in her hands. She gave Stiles a dispassionate once-over and then turned slightly to Stooges One and Two. "This is the Sheriff's sub?"

Cowboy shrugged. "It's his kid, anyways, and he's definitely a sub." He spat at Stiles' foot, and Stiles grimaced as the glob of tobacco-colored spittle slid over the toe of his shoe.

"Gross, dude," he muttered. "Were you raised by wolves?" He was terrified, but determined to be snarky and brave and not cave to whatever they might ask. Because sarcasm is Stiles' best defense. He needed to make his father proud, for when he got rescued. Unless he managed to escape.

Stiles liked the idea of rescuing himself. He hated the narrative of the helpless sub. Of course he would escape. (And wouldn't that just show everyone who always pushed him around and denigrated his orientation?) He only needed to keep an eye out for an opportunity.

His comment wasn't appreciated, and Cowboy hurled himself forward, snarling something about animal filth, which, *what?* The woman flung out the arm holding the collar across his chest, stopping him dead. "Shut up, Gunner," she said coldly. "Collar him and lock him back up." She looked back at Stiles. "Do you know why you're here, sub?"

Stiles forced his frozen face into something he hoped resembled an insouciant sneer. "Because you're tired of a life of petty crime and are ready for the big time? Misdemeanors not enough for you these days? You're aiming higher? My dad is the Sheriff, you know. You're not going to get away with this." His breath was thin and shaky, but he could still talk, thank god. "Tweedledumb and Tweedledumber here don't seem like real brain trusts. I'm sure they left plenty of evidence at the scene of the crime. Like, you know, *my entire car.*"

The woman looked at him consideringly while the two stooges snarled, not appreciating the impugnment of their characters in front of their boss. Cowboy... Gunner, the woman had said... snatched the collar from his boss and marched up to Stiles, wrapping it around his neck while the giant held him still. Stiles twisted and dodged as best as he could, but ultimately couldn't prevent himself from being collared. Gunner spitefully pulled the band so tight that Stiles could hardly breathe, locking it in on its narrowest hole while Stiles choked.

"It doesn't matter to us if your father knows who we are," the woman answered, ignoring the struggle going on in front of her. "We'll let him know we're in the area anyway. We have you to guarantee his ongoing good behavior, after all." She slid her hands into her back pockets and smirked at him.

Stiles bared his teeth at her, jerking against the mountainous man behind him and ignoring the other two. She laughed at him. "You're just a little human, and a sub at that," she said, baffling Stiles. (*Human???*) She pulled back one corner of her mouth in a disdainful moue. "You're no more intimidating than a kitten. Just know that your father's health and well-being might hinge on your behavior, so if you care about whether or not he has two functioning arms when we're done with this affair, you'll want to be a good little sub."

She turned and stalked out of the room without waiting for a response.

Stiles doesn't know how long it has been since then. More than a week, he is certain. Possibly two. He'd learned the woman was Laxmi, and is definitely in charge, and her second-in-command was Baron, the giant. The wonder twins were Gunner and Rudy, and they were both petty, sadistic little bastards, tenaciously fixated on making Stiles thoroughly miserable.

He'd been left alone for a few days at first, just him and a squashed sleeve of sliced bread in the little room. He supposed he should be grateful there was a light as well as toilet and a sink so he could drink and piss. He spent a full day tugging at the new collar. It was brutally stiff and far too constricting, buckled so tightly that it was perilously close to asphyxiating him unless he took care to breathe slowly and shallowly. It cut painfully into his skin, and Stiles couldn't even work his

finger under it, only cutting at his own flesh with his fingernail when he tried. He spent hours fiddling with the little lock over the buckle, but tugging and twisting it did nothing but leave him bruised and aching, so he finally learned to leave it alone.

By the third day he was twitching out of his skin, the meds for his ADHD having worked their way out of his system. It was hell. He couldn't sit still for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time, jumping up to pace around the tiny cell again and again, counting laps, counting the concrete blocks that made up the walls (one hundred and eighty eight of them). He'd fidgeted with every pipe fitting he could twiddle on the sink and behind the toilet, but hadn't had the strength to move any of them. He'd picked at a little divot in the smooth concrete floor until his finger bled, but that was pointless as well. He just couldn't stop himself, couldn't sit and stare at the wall for endless days with nothing to occupy himself.

He recited the periodic table, conjugated all the Spanish verbs he knew, contemplated making up his own language and fucking with the grammatical rules just to screw with people who'd want to learn it (because, why, *why*, irregular verbs?) He tried to list the Presidents in alphabetical order. He acted out most of Iron Man, until his muscles ached from bouncing off the walls and his voice was hoarse from talking.

Not only was the ADHD guiding his fruitless activities (and damaging himself as well, he realized as he fought for breath against the bruising stricture of the collar), but also his fear, striving to create an environment he could control in the midst of this uncertainty. He almost wished someone would come back downstairs just to give him something new to think about instead of what they might want to do to him or his father.

He regretted that thought within the first few seconds that his wish was granted.

Gunner and Rudy opened the door, and Stiles should have guessed from their grinning faces that he wouldn't like what would follow.

“Why don't you crawl on over here, *knee walker*,” Gunner sneered.

Stiles made an exaggeratedly surprised face. “How about fuck you, no way, you're not my Dom, asshole?” he replied.

Gunner surprised him then by bellowing, in Dom voice, “*On your knees now, you sub piece of shit!*”

The power behind his command was startling and difficult to resist. But Stiles locked his knees and remained standing. He had assumed that neither Gunner nor Rudy were Doms, although they clearly weren't subs either. That was normal. Just over half of the population remained neutral, never presented as one or the other. Male subs, on the other hand, were quite uncommon, and often looked down upon, so he was accustomed to being essentially bullied by Doms pretty much since he'd expressed at puberty. Stiles had learned to fight against his nature, rebelling against the need to submit when assholes like Jackson and his friends would show off by making him drop in public. They still tried, but Stiles had developed a backbone of titanium after years of being made to lick shoes or carry someone's girlfriend on his back, and they rarely succeeded in dropping him anymore.

He curled his lip at Gunner, in spite of the ripple of need inside him to do as the man said. “Fuck. You.”

Gunner tried to Dom him a few more times, and then Rudy pushed him out of the way and gave it a shot as well. Stiles slowly sat himself down on the toilet, stretched out his legs, stacking one ankle over the other, and gazed away from them at the wall. He crossed his arms to hide his shaking hands under his biceps, because these men were no teenagers, they were full-grown and *powerful*, much stronger than he'd have guessed; resisting them was nearly impossible and getting harder with each repetition. He wondered again who these people were and what they wanted from him.

Rudy broke first, dashing across the room to grab the back of his head and smash it down on the edge of the sink. "Submit, you dirty *hole*."

"No. God, you're such a *douche*canoe." Stiles blinked against the spinning lights in his peripheral vision and ignored the flaring pain from his forehead. "Read. My. Lips. You fucking dickwad. You have *no power over me*." And he prayed the wavering quality of his voice was hidden behind his arrogance and pride.

"Do it together," Gunner said, wising up. "*Kneel! Kneel! Kneel!*" Rudy joined in, and the intensifying need to drop to his knees, to please his Dom, inevitably became too much to defy. Stiles slowly slipped from his seat to his knees, hands twitching feeble resistance at his sides. He wanted to argue some more, had some choice insults ready to fire, but all that came out of his mouth was a little whimper, a choking little growl, as the word *kneel* swelled before and over and around him like a tsunami, until he was engulfed and pulled under, until his head fell to the side submissively, eyes clouded and lowered.

Of course the first thing they did was make him lick their shoes. Of *course* it was. They were less creative than even Jackson. And part of Stiles retreated, screaming denial and rage and terror, disassociating from the crawling thing he was becoming, completely repelled by his own weakness.

The day passed in an enforced haze. Cleaning. Kneeling. "Stupid Sub Tricks", as Rudy put it, laughingly making him play fetch, drink from a bowl on the floor. When Stiles woke much later that night, locked in the dark room, he had his first panic attack, hyperventilating and shuddering until he finally passed out entirely.

The days after that were no better, getting progressively more degrading and violent. As much as he resisted, Stiles slipped under their control as soon as they combined their voices, and he had to lock more and more of himself away just to be able to tolerate the hours. It was days before he realized he'd stopped speaking, and days after that before he realized he couldn't even when he tried. He had to wet his bread in the sink before he could swallow any, now, and he didn't know if he'd stopped speaking because of the collar damaging his larynx or because it was his only way to fight off insanity. The distinction began to matter less and less.

Until they'd thrown the stranger in with him. And tortured the man terribly the next day.

Stiles had wiped the blood off the floor under the man's feet with a kitchen towel ironically decorated with a rainbow array of kittens, and mechanically cleaned and dried the knives that Laxmi and Baron had been sliding into the new captive's flesh.

Stiles doesn't know who he is, or why the four captors are doing these terrible things to him, but he recognizes that they are brothers in war. Even if this man is... *different*. Stiles' memories of what happens outside his cell, when he is forcibly dropped, are always remote and fuzzy, like fragments of a barely recalled dream, but he has the vivid impression of glowing red eyes, an inhuman snarl, teeth that are too long and sharp and the chilling echo of a long-drawn-out howl.

Chapter End Notes

This phenomenal art is by [lenaospinka](#), whom you should all go check out immediately, and you should [reblog](#) it, to give her more exposure, because she's really *amazeballs*.

Little Bit of Exploration

Chapter Notes

Y'all are amazing. Have I said that before? I was just looking over the numbers for this story, and only four chapters in it's already garnered 620 kudos, 200 bookmarks and over 13k hits.

I'm sooo...*flabbergasted*. And honored. And happy. Evidently, at least 600 of you are just like me, and absolutely *needed* some mute!sub!Stiles being tortured in a basement in your lives. Ah, all the tropes. No really, ***all the tropes*** are coming. Well, everything short of the kitchen sink.

I'm sorry I haven't responded to comments from the last chapter yet. It's been a whirlwind of a fortnight, you don't even want to know. But know that I *love* them, love hearing from you, so don't give up on me.

So here, have another chapter, wherein Stiles gets some insight into his cellmate. Many thanks to [Domachenkov](#), who beta'd with a single hour's notice. That woman is a miracle.

When Stiles wakes up in confining arms, feeling the abnormal heat and power in the body that binds him, he remembers Laxmi's derisive and mystifying, "You're just a little *human*, and a sub at that," from the first, awful day.

Stiles freezes and his heart goes wild, hammering until he has trouble breathing. Intellectually, he knows it's a reasonable assumption that this ... man?... isn't going to hurt him. He's had plenty of opportunity, and is at worst aloof and bored by his 'human' cellmate and at best has been both comforting and careful with Stiles. But fangs and blood and wrenching howls are blurred into a chaotic nightmare in Stiles' mind and he finds it hard not to panic.

A hand splays over his heart and pushes inward, as though it could physically arrest that runaway organ. "Stiles," comes from behind him, gusted behind the shell of his ear. "Shhhh. Breathe." The man murmurs soothingly, isn't using Dom voice, although Stiles instinctively realizes that he could and that it would be very strong. Even so, Stiles is subsumed with the urge to obey, and he calms down a bit.

"Breathe," the man says again and his other hand slips down Stiles' arm to gather up both his wrists in a firm grip. Stiles' mind may be running monsters in a constant loop, but his body recognizes safety and relaxes in spite of himself, obeying the strength and surety underlying the order. "Good boy," the voice behind him continues as Stiles falls loose and pliant against his chest.

The praise, the rumbling, confident tone, initiates a liquid surge of endorphins that rush through Stiles' blood, singing and intoxicating beneath his skin; and a hitching little sigh escapes him as he grows warmer, an unexpected current of arousal thrumming through him that he is inexplicably too relaxed to fight. Fingers clamp harder around his wrists in response.

The man behind him inhales sharply and muffles another, more intent *Good boy* into his nape, as he noses along the length of Stiles' neck; and Stiles' head lolls submissively to the side before he can

think to resist. Breath is hot on his skin, which becomes a dissolving barrier, tissue-thin, almost painfully sensitized to the slowly investigating pressure of the man's nose, the calescent and humid burn of him as his lips part to close around Stiles' thundering pulse.

Stiles allows heavy eyes to close, feels his mouth gaping for air. He is inclined to whine, to whimper and moan, but his throat is frozen and unyielding: all he can do is gasp. The brush of tongue and teeth at the base of his neck ignites a volcanic response, skin plumping and flush with blood, groin tingling and twitching with anticipation, an electric sizzle radiating outward from every point of contact between their bodies. His brain slows to a crawl, caught in the warm syrup of this intensely physical response, and he remains compliant and unmoving, captured in the teeth of his Dom.

There is a spasm of tension and a rumbling, predatory growl from the man behind him (which only serves to further heighten Stiles' blood) but after a frozen moment, hard muscles soften, releasing their grip and smoothly urging Stiles forward off of his chest.

Stiles moves reluctantly; not helping and even passively resisting this gentle but inexorable ouster, still feeling unaccountably drugged at the husky *Good boy* that had been whispered approvingly into his skin. He's solicitously maneuvered far enough away that there's no more contact between them. Stiles grimaces and turns around as soon as he's released, squirming until he sits cross-legged and they are face to face. The overhead light continues to glare, and he's sure it mercilessly exposes the rosy tint he hopes will soon fade from his face and ears, flagrantly broadcasting his arousal and embarrassment.

Now that Stiles has light enough to see without being either terrified or dropped, he seizes the opportunity to really *look* at his fellow prisoner. When he's not bloody and strung up on an electric fence like some sick offering, he's much more pleasant to look at. To be honest, he is outrageously hot. What Stiles takes in primarily, due to the man's very distracting half-naked state, is mouth-watering acres of muscle and smooth, pale skin accented with wild black hair and stubble worthy of a lumberjack or a model. His eyes are bright and light, not red at all, more heterochromatic, green and blue with flashes of gold, and framed by lush dark eyelashes.

Stiles unconsciously licks his lips, dropping his gaze from broad and heavy shoulders to a sweep of wiry hair over a pale chest that could have been hewn from marble, deeply chiseled with hard-earned muscle. This tapers down to a narrow waist, taut with muscle as well, bisected with a decisive treasure trail, spilling into a hard iliac *V* before disappearing behind dark jeans, visibly damp from yesterday's water and blood. The crotch of them bulges with what can only be a *very* generous package.

After a prolonged and appreciative survey, in which Stiles honestly forgets that the work of art in front of him is an actual body belonging to an actual living being that is *watching him back*, Stiles finally manages to wrench his eyes back up to the man's face. He neglects to close his mouth, though, not realizing that it has been hanging open until his throat begins to dry out. He shuts it with a snap, and can't prevent his face from flaming when he realizes how unabashedly and *salaciously* he'd been staring.

Awkwardness, thy name is Stiles.

This paragon of male beauty flashes the briefest smirk before smoothing it out into a faint frown. "Are you all right?" he asks.

Stiles fingers his throat and opens his mouth, but still no words will come. He pokes the damn collar and then nods instead, sliding his hand around to the back of his head, rubbing it briskly over his hair. He is distracted by new scratches on his arm and furrows his brow, confused. He presses at a couple of the cuts, but they don't sting as they likely should. The man makes a small noise and pushes his hand away. "Don't," he says. "You'll make it worse."

Before Stiles can censor his impulses (no Adderall in howevermany days, what can you expect?), he's reached forward to palm the frankly riveting presentation of pectoral perfection in front of him. It is as hot and as hard as he'd thought, and he slides his hand down in a fractional caress before coming to his senses and realizing he's groping a... potentially... *nonhuman person*. He flails a little and then attempts to deflect from his gaucherie by pointing deliberately to a spot where a knife had been sunk the day before, he is sure of it.

Actually, he remembers more than he thought, and slowly traces across the unblemished skin before him as his memory paints it in lines of red. He looks up at the man and cocks a questioning eyebrow at him, poking a couple of times with his index finger at places where definite wounds should be.

"Derek," says the object of his attentions. Stiles stares at him blankly. The man taps his own chest. "I'm Derek," he says more slowly. He then taps Stiles. "And you're Stiles, right?"

After a brief moment where Stiles struggles to stifle utterly inappropriate laughter, he rolls his eyes and quickly nods. *Yeah, yeah, Tarzan. Me Stiles, you Derek. Duh. What about the super healing, dude?* He thumps the man hard on the sternum to make him focus and then redraws his lines, asking the question with his expression again, using both eyebrows this time for emphasis. Derek looks down and rubs his hand across his chest as if erasing Stiles' marks. "It's nothing," he mutters.

Stiles pouts and shakes his head emphatically. A complete lack of wounds certainly isn't 'nothing'. *Stiles' irrepressible curiosity™* overtakes his prior fears, and he boldly reaches forward with both hands and rubs his thumbs across Derek's very mobile, crawling caterpillars of eyebrows, traces a path down from each ear to indicate the hairy sideburns from the day before. He points at Derek's eyes and fearlessly (and stupidly) actually sticks his fingers in the man's mouth to lift his lip, demonstrating flat human teeth.

Astonishingly (and this makes him unique among all the people Stiles has annoyed), Derek remains placid and statuesque, permitting these liberties and investigations. But Stiles interprets the emotion that widens kaleidoscopic eyes as respect for his audacity, and cannot help but be smug.

After lingeringly (*cough*) touching every anomaly he can recall through the haze of yesterday's frankly nightmarish subspace, Stiles sits back, pulling one hand away but leaving the other on Derek's shoulder (and not just because it is so pleasingly solid and rounded with muscle, not at all). He purses his lips and glares a bit. *What ARE you dude?* he asks via exaggerated facial contortion.

Derek looks uncomfortably around the cell, and then spends a moment with an unfocused expression, almost as if he's listening to what is happening elsewhere in the house. It seems to satisfy him, because he sighs briefly as his gaze returns to Stiles. "I'm a werewolf," he says abruptly, and then seems to hold himself very still, as if in fear of judgment.

Stiles hadn't thought his eyebrows could go any higher, but it seems indeed they can. His mouth is hanging open again, but he can't be bothered with details like that. He waits, incredulous, and then rolls a hand indicating that Derek needs to do a few tricks to demonstrate this werewolfiness if he wants to be taken seriously.

Derek pretends not to understand for a bit before huffing. He closes his eyes, and when they open, they're the same glowing, demonic shade of red that pierce Stiles' fuzzy memory.

Rationally, Stiles should be feeling petrified about now. Not only has he been kidnapped and abused and traumatized, knowing nothing of what they have planned for his future, but now he knows they've locked him in a room with a monster from a late-nite movie.

Stiles prides himself in being unpredictable, however, and rationale is for those without intellect and creativity, as far as he's concerned. He puts two fingers against Derek's upper lip and waits until Derek pulls it up with a soft growl, this time revealing canines that are much too long and heavy to be human, designed to tear and ravage. Stiles presses his finger against one, feeling the sharp point of it, and is delighted with the mystery.

For a just a moment Derek seems bewildered, rendering him poignantly young and lonely and... hopeful? Stiles' heart jumps in response, each new thump instructing him to make the Dom in front of him feel better. Without thinking too much about his motivations, he flattens his hand against the side of Derek's face and nods his head with a huge grin, enthusiastically demonstrating his desire to know more, to see everything Derek can do.

After a somewhat flabbergasted double-take, Derek shifts the rest of the way, brow growing heavier, his very *skull* thicker under Stiles' curious fingers, eyebrows vanishing into a smooth ridge of thick skin over heavy bone. Derek's face protrudes more into a snout and hair sprouts profusely along the margins of his face.

Stiles is fascinated, to say the least, and doesn't even *think* to control himself. He looks with his hands, as he's always done, exploring all the changes in Derek's visage before sliding past slightly more hirsute shoulders and chest to pick up one clawed hand, twisting it this way and that, prodding at the elongated talons at the terminal of each crooked finger. The pointed rim of Derek's ears catch his attention next, and he must feel them up as well, combing through Derek's hair to see all the parts of him that have transformed.

Finally Derek pushes him gently away with a chuff that sounds like a laugh, and his features slowly morph back into the dazzling man he'd at first appeared to be. Stiles makes a moue of disappointment, but sits back instinctively, blinking in surprise at himself, when Derek chastises him with a barking grunt.

Derek looks surprised as well. Or actually, downright shocked. Stiles supposes that revealing himself as a werewolf must not normally go so smoothly.

Oh! New wheels begin spinning in Stiles' brain. *Is this why he's here? Are the people upstairs some kind of monster-hunters?* Stiles points to his own useless human canines than up at the ceiling, trying to mime his question. Derek looks at him blankly. Stiles frowns then cups his hands around his mouth, indicating a mute howl and then flaps his fingers at what are definitely not pointy ears. He jabs at Derek and then upstairs again, poking a few times at the man's chest to emphasize his query. (And because it is a truly glorious chest, Stiles can be forgiven for being unable to resist its magnetic perfection, he really can.)

Derek snarls a little at him, grabs his wandering hand and moves it forcefully away. But he doesn't let go, and although Stiles should rightly be shitting himself right now, he strangely feels no fear. He waggles his eyebrows a few times, not trying to free his hand from Derek's grip, just reiterating his silent interrogation.

Derek lets him go and folds his arms defensively across his chest, obviously succumbing, as everyone eventually must, to Stiles' sheer persistence. "Are you asking if they have me because I'm a wolf?" he divines. Stiles nods like a bobble-head.

"They do," Derek replies. "They're *hunters*." He hisses the words like it's something filthy. "Dedicate their lives to hunting down my kind, killing innocent wolves and humans alike." His lips tighten and the corners of his eyes turn down. "They're supposed to live by a Code, only hunting wolves who have taken the lives of innocent humans. Killing the ones who have gone rogue, or feral." His jaw works for a few silent heartbeats, before he takes a deep breath and visibly tries to exhale some of his sudden tension.

"And there *are* those who are honorable.... Who enforce the Code even when one of their own goes bad. My... my... pack has had a treaty with one family for many years." He growls, animalistic and furious: the sound drags on and lifts the hairs on the back of Stiles' neck. "And *they* better not know anything about *these* bastards." He blinks, suddenly, seems to recall that Stiles is with him in the room. "The ones who have us are more like the hunters everyone else knows about: heartless monsters who get off on the kill. They don't care about the ruin they leave in their wake."

He appears momentarily devastated, and Stiles gulps at the heart-rending wave of sorrow and loss that seems to emanate from him.

Swallowing was a mistake, and their conversation is unceremoniously terminated as Stiles chokes in the noose of his collar, gurgling and gasping, fighting for every breath. After an eternity of clawing for air he finds himself on hands and knees, Derek's hand on his back, whispered non-words spilling around him as he finally controls it, begins to breathe, shallow and slow and even. They settle back against the wall, shoulder to shoulder, while Stiles shakily scrubs the involuntary tears from his eyes and waits for the sweat on his skin to dry. Fucking collar. God, he hates it.

Derek stomach rumbles noticeably, and Stiles grins at him, elbowing him doofily in the side while wiggling his eyebrows again. Derek gives him a kind of half smile and shrugs. "They offer room service?" Stiles twitches a shoulder at him and tilts his hand side to side in a so-so gesture. The last loaf of bread ran out just before Derek was tossed in with him, and Stiles hasn't eaten since then, although he vaguely recalls sneaking a few bites of lunch meat yesterday when he'd made the hunters' sandwiches.

Derek sighs and leans a little closer. "You've been here for a *while*," he says unhappily. "You must be hungry."

Stiles shrugs again and kind of points to his collar. *Lost cause, dude. Hurts too much to eat anyway.*

Derek frowns ferociously at that, and pulls Stiles in front of him with no warning, pushing his head down to expose the buckle of the collar. Stiles stops his reactionary flailing and relaxes when he realizes what's right-side-up again, allows Derek to angle his head as he sees fit.

Derek pops a claw, which Stiles finds fascinating, and then tries to work it under the edge of the collar. Stiles' breathing catches in a pained gasp, and he clenches both hands into Derek's outstretched legs. His neck is so swollen at this point that inflamed skin overhangs the edge of the collar. There's no way Derek can get it off without slicing a significant and potentially vital portion of him. He grits his teeth and scrunches his eyes shut, however, willing to let Derek find out for himself.

After ten fruitless minutes, there is blood trickling down Stiles' neck and forming an itchy crust against the collar, but the leather hasn't even been nicked. Derek tries twisting the padlock off, and even filing a claw into a sharper point against the rough concrete to attempt picking the lock. But nothing happens except that now Stiles' neck is more bruised and swollen than before, and bleeding to boot.

Derek rises suddenly and wordlessly from behind Stiles and spins to viciously punch the wall with a frustrated shout before stalking to the sink. He wets the shirt and squats in front of Stiles, scowling hard in contrast to his gentle touch as he mops up the small trickles of blood. Stiles pats him on the shoulder, trying to indicate that it's ok, but Derek shakes his head. "Sorry," he mutters. And Stiles wonders if anyone's ever heard him say that before.

Derek lays one hand across the entire front of Stiles neck, from the soft skin under his chin down to his suprasternal notch, palming over the cruel cut of the collar. He draws in a breath and then, shockingly, Stiles feels the pain simply... recede. He wraps his hands around Derek's forearm, which slowly colors with a web of black, as if Stiles discomfort has been translated into darkened veins as Derek pulls it away. In its place, Stiles is left with a faint feeling of giddiness and euphoria, suffused in warmth and ease. His mouth drops open in a loose, dopey grin, and Derek smiles back briefly, brushing his thumb against the corner of Stiles' mouth. "Let me know if it starts to hurt again, ok?" he says.

Stiles nods, but Derek doesn't move, fingertips pressing and releasing his skin in slow waves. "I. Do you remember last night? My mouth has. Um. I can-"

Stiles stares at him, lifts his hand to cover Derek's own, holding it between his palm and binding leather. Ha. He *knew* he'd been licked last night. He glances at his arms, looking a day or two more healed already, and nods his permission.

Derek leans him forward, guiding his head to the side to expose the area where he'd been working. Stiles lets himself be maneuvered, holding his breath in anticipation, excited at the thought of that heated mouth open against his neck once more.

Derek shuts his eyes as he moves in, rests his lips lightly against Stiles' skin before opening up. His tongue is soft and wet; the sweep of it along the edge of the collar is surprisingly soothing, infinitely better than cold tap water and ribbed undershirt. Stiles shivers and clutches at Derek's forearms, a bit too buzzed to try to play it cool, and licks his own lips in unconscious mimicry.

Derek laps and sucks at him, supporting his head with one hand since the limp noodle of his neck has cheerfully abandoned its responsibilities. Softly prickling scrub around Derek's mouth chafes delightfully against the frangible skin stretching tight around Stiles' throat. There is no mitigation of pain, since whatever Derek did with his hand earlier has already removed it, which leaves Stiles free to float in the sensuality of the act, making a note somewhere deep in his subconscious to look up werewolf saliva when he has a chance.

Stiles twitches and tightens his grip when he feels the delicate probing of Derek's tongue, an attempt to insinuate itself underneath the unforgiving leather. It can't, of course, but the effort feels exquisite, and Stiles figures he's probably flushed clear down to his chest when Derek finally pulls away. His lips are red and juicy, gleaming a little in the light, and Stiles wants to *eat* them.

Before Stiles can do anything embarrassing, like fling himself forward to hug the guts out of the man crouched in front of him (or try to eat him), Derek stiffens, one hand warningly on Stiles shoulder. He cocks his head, for all the world like a dog hearing something outside the house. His

face darkens and his hands clenches on Stiles' shoulder before he pulls it away. "They're back," he growls, and stands up to face the door.

A Grim Lesson in Torment and Humiliation

Chapter Notes

Whew, this started out as a very short chapter, and I almost doubled it in the past few hours, which means I'm cutting my deadline pretty close. At Domachenkov's suggestion, I went into a little more detail about what's happening to Stiles as Derek watches. Um. It isn't pretty. (I don't know *what* is wrong in my brain, really. Please don't hold this against me!) I tried not to venture into the territory of *torture porn*, but as Doma says, it's a pretty fine line. I might have crossed it? Anyway, consider this your warning. The upshot is that half of this chapter hasn't been betad, and has only had a sketchy once-over from me, so if you see anything that needs fixing, lemme know. Alrighty, then. Have at it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's several hours more before any hunter comes downstairs. Derek eventually relaxes his vigilance, sinking again to the floor to wait. Stiles settles nervously about a foot to his left, picking at the scabs on his arms. He is not close enough to touch, and in spite of (because of) their strange bonding moment earlier, Derek does nothing to coax him closer. There is no point in making it worse for the boy than it will already be when/if the hunters finally kill him, leaving Stiles alone again. Besides, what comfort or protection can Derek offer?

When he hears the two stooges clumping down the stairs, he is almost relieved. At least he won't be waiting anymore. Next to him, Stiles' face is bloodless, his entire chest is blanched but for the bruises, and his breathing has gone completely silent once again. His hands twist in the ragged hem of his jeans, and Derek wants to punch the wall again, furious at his helplessness.

"Stiles," he says, "maybe—" but there's nothing to say, really. The day is likely to be hell, and Derek was never built to lie. He clacks his teeth together in frustration, turning away from the desperation in giant doe eyes, and growls, letting his beta shift sweep over him. He will fight until he can't fight anymore. There's nothing else he can do.

He levers to a crouch when the two hunters reach the bottom of the staircase. Rudy is laughing his creepy-ass insults again, sneering on the other side of the door. "Good night for ya boys? Packing fudge yet, ya dog-faced faggot? I know how much you fucking animals like drilling each other up the ass."

"Aw, fuck, man, that is so *gross*," Gunner may sound honestly disgusted, but he laughs appreciatively nonetheless, a rewarding audience for Rudy, who has a few more, asking if Derek enjoyed having *his dog dick sucked*, if he had to *force the quaggy little stain of a sub to do it*, and *how good did it feel to hold the boy down?*

Interspersed with these crude sexual projections is the shuffle and thump of the hunters setting up outside. After a few minutes of this, Derek grows more and more enraged at their taunts and, on a deeper level, at their denigration of his sub. ... *The sub*. Not *his sub*, of course. Just. Any sub, in general.

The gravevolent vinegar that broadcasts Stiles' shame at hearing Rudy's stream of filthy implications and homophobic garbage literally aggravates Derek's nose. He roars his frustration at the door, flinging himself at it heedlessly.

The door is so solid it doesn't even rattle.

There is, however, a sudden, gratifying surcease of conversation at Derek's frenzied howl, and when he pulls away from the door the only sounds that remain are the gentle hiss of releasing gas and the frantic beating of Stiles' heart.

Stiles begins to choke and wheeze behind him, and Derek wrests back some control, trying to suppress his respiration, loathing himself for the moment of violence that made him let out his original breath.

As the now-familiar burn enters his lungs, stinging the back of his throat and frying his sinuses, he hears Rudy laughing uproariously at him. "The Alpha--" Rudy is gasping. "Oh, god, Gunner. The Alpha's all upset. He thinks that skinny little tip-ass is his *pet*--"

In mere minutes, Derek sinks dizzily to his knees, clawing the concrete floor, manically trying to concentrate on the pair on the other side of the door, trying to hold on long enough to leap at them when they enter.

Somehow, instead, all he can focus on is the uric scour of fear behind him, the irregular clatter of chattering teeth.

And then it all goes black.

Derek wakes chained to the same fucking fence. It's a replay of the day before, next verse same as the first. His eyes seek out Stiles as soon as he registers the two fucking idiots lounging at the table. Baron and Laxmi must be upstairs, although he'd bet good money that Baron had to be involved in helping hoist him up and tie him to the fence. Gunner isn't much more than a malicious, middle-aged stringbean, and the duo seem unlikely to manage carrying someone Derek's size, even if his density were human normal, which it isn't.

Gunner's legs are propped on Stiles' back. The boy rests on hands and knees, almost imperceptibly shaking, head dropped low between his arms. Gunner's boots have spurs, like the pretentious asshole he is, and a thin tracery of blood spiders around Stiles' shoulder blade and ribs. The waist of Stiles' jeans is pulled low, revealing the dimples at the base of his spine, the fragile skin stretched taut over marked ribs, the gap in the front where his stomach has gone concave.

Derek growls and rattles his chains, still caught in a cyclone of fury and grief.

The pair weren't looking at Derek, so the unexpected cascade of noise and aggression makes Gunner jerk so hard he almost falls down, boots catching on Stiles' skin and leaving a wide, bloody scrape in their wake. The boy flinches, but stays as still as he can.

Rudy drops his phone and curses.

"Well. Fuck. Me." Rudy pronounces, from where he's now standing two feet away from his chair in his startlement. "The beast is awake. Now we can have some fun."

The morning's menu of fun activities includes pliers and razors, electricity (constant, constant current escalating periodically into something so unmanageable that Derek is distantly surprised that he hasn't pissed himself) and being pelted with whatever is laying around: hot coffee and other bits of their lunch, tools and hardware, the occasional fusty rag.

Their attention is primarily on Derek, heckling and reveling in their power over an Alpha werewolf. Derek had heard the woman and her second leave the building at some point, tires crunching over gravel; so whatever is happening to him is simply sick entertainment. These men don't even pretend to ask questions.

What Derek would never have predicted is that the worst, most torturous part of the day will be watching what they do to Stiles.

Everything they do to the helpless sub is incidental, thoughtless, which makes it so much worse.

Through a haze of red, shaking and sweaty and roaring with challenge, Derek can only bear witness.

Gunner grins at Derek and very precisely fits the pointed, metal-decked toe of his boot in the shell of Stiles' ear, the boy utterly frozen in his posture as footstool. "We need some proper knives, boy," he says. His eyes are narrow and brown, with slightly yellowed corneas; he doesn't look away from Derek as he speaks to Stiles. "Go get us some." He shoves with his foot, and Derek flinches for the sub, knowing how that must hurt his sensitive ear.

Stiles gasps and starts to curl away before visibly stopping himself. He looks once at Derek and then away again, the miasma of his humiliation and dread saturating the room. "Go!" Gunner shouts impatiently, kicking again. Stiles has moved enough that his ear is preserved, and the boot lands squarely on his collar instead. His breath stalls and rattles, but he gamely staggers to his feet, red-faced and teary-eyed, hands dangling while he tries to breathe.

"I'll go with," Rudy volunteers. "Keep him in line."

"Whatever," Gunner shrugs. "Bring me some crackers, too."

Derek's a little distracted after that, as Gunner works him over with nothing more than his fists. But when Stiles comes back down the narrow stairs, his eyes are swollen and damp, and he carries the handles of a laden grocery bag clenched between his teeth. His elbows are high, wrists crossed behind his head, and Rudy radiates smug satisfaction as he saunters behind him.

"*On your knees, sub,*" Rudy Doms when Stiles enters the basement, and kicks the backs of Stiles legs to facilitate the matter when he seems inclined to balk.

Stiles drops, and when Gunner barks out *Heel, boy*, he reluctantly shuffles over on his knees, proffering the bag of snacks and cutlery with his mouth when he arrives. Derek cringes for the

boy's vulnerability, with his hands held behind his head like that. His pale skin is patterned with a patina of bruises, old and new, a bilious testimony in yellow and green, red and purple. His belly, chest and neck are all exposed, without even the flimsy protection of a shirt, something that a wolf would only find acceptable in an environment of trust and safety.

Derek doesn't imagine it is much different for a human.

Gunner makes no move to take the bag, so Stiles has to knee his way to the table, straining to lift his chin high enough to clear the surface before dropping his burden. He wheezes for air when he's finally freed of the obstruction comprised by a mouthful of plastic, and Derek eyes his stertorous struggle, livid complexion and grossly swollen neck with deep concern and fruitless wrath.

He bites his tongue, though, sure that speaking out will only make matters worse for both of them.

There is a short break (*snack-time for the kiddies!*) while the hunters crunch on crackers and have a couple of Cokes. Stiles remains kneeling. Gunner casually straightens out the sub's arms to leave them hovering at full extension, shoulder-height. He hangs the empty bag from Stiles' fingers, and they slowly refill it with trash.

Then, with no more prelude than an *Open up*, Gunner slides a six inch slicing knife blade-first between Stiles' lips, sharp edge pressing on his tongue, so that Stiles must carefully guard all his soft tissue with his teeth, holding the blade tight.

Gunner grabs his chin and tilts his head towards the ceiling, so that the knife is perpendicular to the floor. The handle wavers above Stiles' face, top-heavy, and the hunters both snicker, spend some time teasing Stiles and warning him not to drop it or cut himself. Rudy has the sudden realization that if Stiles tries to talk, the knife will plummet straight down his throat, and convulses laughing over how convenient it is that Stiles doesn't talk anymore.

Stiles eventually settles on extremely shallow breaths taken through his nose, but his face slowly grows more and more ashen as his arms begin to quiver with the strain of his position. As the blade is fitted vertically between his teeth, Stiles cannot close his lips to swallow, probably couldn't anyway, with his head stretched back at that angle. Drool slides down the corners of his mouth, drying into a flaky white crust.

Rudy is done eating first, leaping to his feet and crushing his soda can as he does so. He shoves it in the bag and flicks Stiles ungentlely on temple, making the knife wobble dangerously. "You thirsty, subslut?"

Stiles wisely ignores him, fearfully centered on the danger presented by the perilous position of the knife in his mouth.

Rudy growls with impatience and jerks the knife out of Stiles' mouth, leaving a thin red trail across the seam of his lip. "I said, *are you fucking thirsty, ass licker?*" Stiles' eyes dart around, as if hoping for someone to tell him how he's supposed to answer. He licks the blood off his lip and sort of shrugs, taking the opportunity to lower his arms with a tiny, juddering sigh of relief.

Rudy dumps some coffee out of a lipstick-stained mug and fills it at the sink. "Here, have a drink, then," he snorts, stooping to place the dirty mug on the floor. "*Hands behind your back!*"

Derek can sense Stiles fighting off subspace, can feel in his own gut the effort the boy is exerting to rise through the haze and confusion, to shake it off and fight back. His eyes catch the light like a

beta, just a brief golden flash as he tilts his head and frowns. His upper lip lifts in a snarl and his fingers curl into fists.

Gunner notices immediately and moves one leg around to get the sole of his boot on the back of Stiles' neck. He's violently swung on the pendulum of Gunner's kick, crashing to the floor in a blink, scarcely turning his head soon enough to save his nose from being broken. Gunner hasn't even stood, just sits there with one leg extended, pushing down on Stiles' head and neck with his boot, spur dangling just in front of his chin.

"*Down!*" Gunner Doms. He jerks his head in command to Rudy, who joins in. "*Down, down, down!*" they chant in tandem. Derek cannot see Stiles' expression, but his hopelessness is an efflux of sickly rancidity that communicates his state of mind uncomfortably clearly, independent of speech or mien. When the Doms have successfully controlled him, Stiles is stretched full length on his belly, nose pressed to the floor, arms by his sides with palms curled upward, in the *Down* position, and Derek is snarling and growling at the men who gloat above Stiles, each with a foot on his body.

Rudy picks the knife off the floor and throws it at Derek, but it rolls sideways in the air and bounces harmlessly off the fence with a crackling spark.

Gunner rolls his eyes. "We aren't gonna get anything done from this distance," he says, rubbing his hands together. "It's showtime."

The next hour is a blur of pain and savagery. Derek finds a measure of relief in sheer volume, and bellows in great wordless shouts that have more to do with fury and impotence than anguish or fear.

The afternoon crawls by. The hunters get tired of cutting their names and other obscenities into Derek's chest eventually, and turn their attention back to Stiles. And so it goes, in an endless, grisly, excruciating loop.

Derek watches, panting and bloody, as Stiles is ordered to clean, to fetch things from upstairs, to kneel and crawl. When Gunner goes upstairs, Rudy forces Stiles to piss in the sink (his heart skitters and his hands tremble wildly when he takes out his soft cock, and Derek wants to scream and scream and never stop) watching avidly as the boy struggles to perform. And then Stiles has to scrub the sink clean after getting knocked around when Gunner returns and is disgusted.

He surfaces sometimes, eyes dazed and agonized, and tears at his collar while shaking his head. But then Gunner and Rudy will take a break from Derek to Dom him back into submission. They are always worse to Stiles after he shows any resistance.

Rudy thinks it would be hilarious if Stiles were to do some cutting on Derek. The boy shudders and throws himself backwards when they command him to take the knife, to cut. Gunner deals blows like largess, and blood is smeared under Stiles' nose and across his cheek, one eye reddened and beginning to swell before they can control him again, commanding and kicking him into compliance.

Stiles approaches Derek with a blank face, at last, fingers wrapped white knuckled around the slick handle of a kitchen knife already painted in Derek's blood. His eyes are glassy, wet; tears leak down his cheek, making watercolors of the red smeared across it. His hand shakes as he lifts the knife, pressing the blade against Derek's side.

And then he stops, shaking his head, mouth moving in a silent *No, no, no*, and Derek hears the bubbling whistle of his inhale through the congestion in his nose.

It takes strength to pierce Derek's skin. The knife is dull, and Derek doesn't have the soft, tissue-thin covering that Stiles does. Stiles cannot cut through. Gunner stands behind him and jerks on the lock of his collar, choking him, pulling him back and then pushing him forward again and again until he's shaking the boy like a ragdoll. "Do it," he shouts.

Rudy doesn't wait, just wraps his hand around the sub's and jabs the blade in, dragging it around to Derek's belly.

Stiles makes a tiny noise: so small, the noise is so small next to the shouting of the hunters, the constant crackle and sizzle of electricity, drowned, even, in the stuttering thunder of his heart and Derek's grunt of pain. An infinitesimal protest.

Stiles lurches forward a step, a slow collapse. He slides into Derek's hip before his shoulder collides with the singing fence, where he convulses and hangs for the longest moment, eyes wide and mouth open, before Rudy jerks him away. He throws Stiles to the ground, where the boy collapses bonelessly, like laundry, a final sounding *crack* when his skull bounces once off the floor.

Gunner stares at Stiles for a moment before sneering, "God, dicked subs are so fucking *feeble*. He's weaker than a girl. He's as much an abomination as the fucking wolf." He kicks the pathetic bundle of unconscious boy before returning his attention to Derek.

Derek doesn't know how long it is after that. He never thought he'd look forward to being gassed with aconite so desperately.

Chapter End Notes

Was that as bad as I think it was? It makes a striking picture, though, doesn't it? Stiles kneeling in a filthy basement, in a thick collar, head tipped back, outstretched arms weighted down with a bag of trash while a kitchen knife is perilously balanced between his teeth? One wrong move....

ETA: Hmm, the preliminary consensus is that it IS that bad. I'm so sorry for all the pain, my darlings! Probably Domachenkov would have saved us all if I hadn't waited until literally the last minute. But know this: The next two chapters are 6k of comfort. Comfort and snuggles and caretaking and sexytimes (!!! at last!) and hand feeding and werewolf pain mojo, so DO NOT FRET. Chapter 9 is gonna be this bad (see warning at the beginning of this story), but that's the only other one. So you don't have to worry that all the remaining 40k words are gonna be so hard to read. I WILL TAKE CARE OF ALL OF YOU, MY DARLINGS, I PROMISE.

Post-Nightmare Smexytimes

Chapter Notes

I know I lost a few readers after the last chapter, so here's a big hug  for those of you who are sticking it out. And now for your reward: some comfort and smex. Enjoy!

And thanks, as always, to Domachenkov, who is consistently both thoughtful AND thinky.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Stiles jerks awake violently, kneels upright before he even knows what or where he is. His mouth opens to scream, but there is no sound, only the painful rasping of his throat that leads to silent, agonizing coughs.

He can't see a thing. Everything is dark and Stiles doesn't know what is happening and he feels terror like he's never felt before, skin prickling with icy sweat. He tries to breathe, but only chokes, gasping, tearing at the collar. His bare back hits a rough, cold surface, and Stiles scrabbles at it, levering himself to standing. Every useless swing of his head, trying to see the monsters in the dark, sends nauseating waves of pain crashing from one ear to the other, until he thinks he might die because if he vomits with this noose around his neck, it will surely kill him.

He holds his arms defensively in front of his chest, fingers twitching into claws that tear furrows into his skin, one, two, three, each bright line of pain an effort to anchor himself to *something*, rather than drifting in the dark.

Someone murmurs, low, in the darkness. A wash of sound like a warm cloth, primarily a susurruus, as someone gently shushing him. Stiles squeezes his eyes shut until phosphenes scatter, white and green around him.

He begins to feel light-headed, dizzy from straining for breath. Before him, melting out of the phosphenes that he knows are only the random firing of his own neurons, two faintly glowing red spots solidify in front of him, floating low, vanishing and reappearing with the regularity of blinks.

“Stiles,” he hears, drifting quiet from the void around him. “*Stiles!*” The red points resolve into eyes, he *knows* they are eyes. “Stiles, calm down. You're hurting yourself. *Calm down.*”

Stiles hovers there for an eternity, the unforgiving icy scrape at his back the only thing keeping him upright, focused intently on the red eyes, dazed with lack of air. The voice continues, calm and reassuring, not commanding him into submission, only asking him gently. “You should sit down before you fall down, Stiles. I'm not going to hurt you, you know that. You're safe here. For now,” the voice adds wryly.

Stiles loose knees give way abruptly, dropping him to the floor.

Right. He remembers where he is. Kidnapped and imprisoned in some weird basement with... with... a werewolf. The red eyes shift away, dimming to faint crescents, as the werewolf looks at something else.

Stiles just sits for a moment, trying to catch his breath. He fingers his neck, feeling how his skin has swollen even more, puffing out over the collar, too cool to the touch, as if necrosis has begun. He shuts his eyes to regulate his breathing, in and out through his mouth: quiet, shallow, slow and steady, so that each breath doesn't fight for space when it passes by the cruelly cutting collar. An appreciated bonus of breathing this way is that it renders him utterly silent, making him feel safer, invisible.

Not that invisible is necessary at the moment, unless Derek can see in the dark. Stiles hates it when his captors turn off the light and he has no idea what time it is, whether it's day or night. He doesn't know when they'll pull him out again. Right now, he doesn't even know where the door is. He scrabbles a bit to the right, slowly crawling with one hand stretched up the wall, high enough to feel if he should hit the doorknob or the sink. It's something he does regularly when he's kept in the dark, terrified that he might wind up leaning against the door, that the kidnappers will open it and be able to grab him from his vulnerable back.

"Are you okay, Stiles? What are you doing?"

Stiles ignores the questions, shuffling further to hit a corner and spidering his way across it to the next wall. Moving *hurts*. His knees are swollen and bruised, his back burns and aches, both with deep muscle pain and more superficial twinges sheeting across his skin, cuts or something, he doesn't even know. He keeps shivering, in deep, painful twitches that make him lose his balance, and the hands he sweeps across the wall weaken at the wrist so that he has to stop for a bit. But as he drops his arms he brushes against the cold edge of the toilet tank, so at least he knows where he is.

Fabric rustles, and the eyes come closer, stooping down to his level. Fingers touch his elbow, and he cannot stop himself from jerking away. "Okay, okay. Calm down." Stiles can sense the body sloping to the side and then dropping to lean against the wall. Warmth fills the air next to his arm, and he knows that they must be nearly touching. It's grounding, in spite of being trapped in the dark, being in so much pain, being so very, very afraid. Tucked between the werewolf and the commode, he feels a little safer than he had before.

Derek sighs next to him. "You were unconscious for a while, earlier. You got that shock, and then you hit your head. Can I... feel it? Check that you'll be alright?"

Stiles tries to huff, because that's just a hoot, isn't it. Yeah, it's likely a little concussion is what'll be taking him out of this game. He doesn't understand the thing about the shock. At first he wonders what someone said or did that was so shocking to him, but then he remembers Derek's daily torment. Did they put Stiles on Derek's fence? Stiles doesn't remember that. Of course, he doesn't remember hitting his head, either. He nods his permission for Derek, though, even though that's pretty dumb, considering they can't see each other.

But Derek responds as if he can see Stiles' assent, and shifts to put both hands gently on either of Stiles' elbows, lightly running his fingers up until they crest his shoulders, swooping in to his neck and then upwards. Stiles wants to push himself into those hands, they feel so hot on his bare skin. Firm and warm and *safe*, always safe, he doesn't know what's wrong with him that a stranger in the dark should bring him so much comfort.

He allows Derek to move his head forward, skimming gentle fingers across his hair. When he hits the goose egg on the back of Stiles head, Stiles jerks forward with a gasp. The hand across his forehead holds him still.

"Hold on," Derek murmurs. "Let me—" His fingers feel warmer for a moment, heat that seems to spread outward, gentle and pervasive, overwhelming the nauseating, throbbing ache in his skull; mitigating the other hurts on his body that had been so loudly clamoring. He isn't numb, he can feel Derek's fingers probe the bump, but it no longer hurts.

Stiles lets his breath out in a sigh, relaxing so quickly he nearly pitches over. He lifts his hands to clasp around Derek's forearm as the hand on his forehead holds him steady.

"Good," Derek breathes. "Gooood. You're so good for me Stiles."

Stiles tries to whimper, to whine, to make some kind of noise, but all he can do is breathe, so he squeezes the heavily muscled forearm between his hands instead.

Derek swings away from the wall, not dislodging that desperate grip, and then kneels in front of Stiles, breathing softly on his face. The hand on his hair slides down to his neck to work its magic on the bruised and swollen skin there; and Derek growls softly the whole time, Stiles can feel the faint vibration under his hands. But he doesn't let go, just leans in harder and harder as Derek's hand moves from hurt to hurt, layering warmth and comfort over pain and fear.

Stiles feels euphoric when the pain is gone, dizzy with it, going limp in Derek's hands, unvoiced moans trapped under the collar. Derek's fingertips are soft, uncalloused as they travel over his skin, coaxing a response from Stiles that nothing and no one else ever has before, leaving him contrarily thrumming and pliant. Blood fizzles in his veins, plumping his skin and heating his ears and filling his cock.

Derek's hand finally rests on his hip, wrapping easily around the side of his body, thumb stroking over the thin skin just above the waist of his jeans. "I can smell your arousal," he whispers.

Stiles' mouth is open, breathing in short little pants, chest straining on whimpers that won't escape. He releases the forearm and reaches blindly for Derek's shoulders, hands slipping on smooth skin, tugging the man closer, warm lassitude fighting contesting shivers of desire, feeling doped as fuck on the lack of pain, on the mojo Derek can do with his hands. In this hazy place, his body transitions the throbbing of pain into a different kind of pulse: he craves Derek's body, his warmth, his weight. Something. Maybe. Stiles doesn't even really *know* what he wants, and he can't fucking talk, and he can't see....

His heart begins to race again, and he shudders with a sharp, incoherent desire, pulling haphazardly at Derek's shoulders, gasping.

"I've got you," Derek growls, the basso reverberation contributing to the fire under Stiles' skin. "I'll take care of you. Come here, pup." And then both hands are at his hips, tugging and lifting until Stiles is arranged straddling Derek's thighs; then his body presses against Derek's, skin to skin, bellies and ribs and chests pushed together. Stiles worms closer, fighting for more, clawing at Derek.

Hot hands press gently on his back, curving around his ribs and tracing the wings of his shoulderblades, smoothing up and down his spine and holding his nape as Stiles hunches down to bury his face into the neck of the man that holds him.

"I've got you," Derek says again. "I know what you need, Stiles. I'll give you what you need." His voice has dropped low, not Dom voice, but still hypnotic with command, promising control and

security. Stiles pulls himself closer and jerkily grinds down with his hips, mouth open on unvoiced pleas, and even his gasps are silent. *Please, please. Do something. I need- I need-*

“Alright,” Derek says. “Do what I tell you, Stiles. Can you do that? Can you be a good boy for me?”

The hectic feeling that had suddenly possessed Stiles begins to subside, although he is still beset by shivering. Stiles stops his thrusting hips, and nods his head, still hiding his face in the warm skin of Derek's shoulder, breathing in the scent of him. He should be rank with sweat and blood and the horrors he knows the man has been through, but instead he smells heavy and dark and safe to Stiles. He focuses on Derek's voice like it is a lighthouse, finding it calming and steady. He still feels stoned, wild and hot and out of his own control, but he recognizes that Derek is about to exercise control *for* him, and he feels desperate for that.

“*Oh,*” Derek whispers, when Stiles stills and goes limp against him, arms dropping until they're only loosely clasped around Derek's hips instead of clawing at his back. “That's beautiful, baby.” Confident hands squeeze around his waist and travel up to just below his armpits, dragging across fine skin, tickling through the hair there. And then Derek's gathers his wrists, and Stiles lets him take their weight, remains slumped and hidden, while he guides them around behind Stiles' back, folds them together, wrapping one hand around both.

“You're so good for me,” Derek murmurs into Stiles' hair. “So good.”

Each word of praise settles under Stiles skin, chasing away the shivering, abating his jitters until what remains is only the honeyed euphoria following the pain drain.

Derek binds Stiles' arms firmly at the small of his back, uses his other hand to tilt Stiles' head a little, trace the edge of his face, skim softly across a bruised cheekbone. “You had such a hard day, Stiles, I'm so impressed with your bravery. You have the heart of a wolf.”

Stiles eyes drift closed, he can feel his eyelashes catching on the stubbled skin under Derek's jaw. His lips twitch into a faint smile as Derek continues, effacing pain from his soul with his words just like he takes the physical pain with his hands. “You were pushed really hard, baby, I know how hard it was, and you did so well.”

Stiles doesn't let his mind touch on what he did that was so difficult. He doesn't need to think about that right now, doesn't need to think at all, just floats in the cocoon of Derek's body and his words. He adjusts his head fractionally until his mouth is against Derek's neck, opening to taste, little kitten licks, lipping rather than sucking, hands safely locked behind him.

Derek jerks when he does that, and Stiles freezes, heart lurching at the thought he's done something wrong, and he begins to surface from the fog that surcease of pain and Derek's voice have wrapped around him. “No,” Derek says, free hand carefully trapping Stiles' head where it rests, lips still against skin. “It's fine, Stiles.” His hand tightens around Stiles' wrists and he shudders. “It's fine. If you need to—”

Stiles doesn't know that he *needs* to, but he relaxes again. Derek's hand is heavy around his skull when he opens his mouth again around the tendon of his neck. He's salty and metallic and bristly with stubble, textured and delightful under Stiles' tongue. Derek groans a little, pressing harder against Stiles' head and Stiles cannot help squirming against him. “*Do not bite me,*” Derek commands quietly, and Stiles take lazy note of the order while his body resonates with the desire to please. He turns his head a little, dragging his lips down to the meat of Derek's shoulder, just

sucking, no biting. His hips begin to roll without his conscious volition, he can feel a hot flush washing across his face and chest, and he sucks a little harder.

“Ah,” Derek makes a noise that means stop, so Stiles does, still in a sleepy place of arousal, pleasant and drifting; it’s like attending to morning wood only so *so* much better. “Very nice, baby. Very quick. You’re so obedient.”

Stiles wakes up enough to shake his head a bit. Derek may be the only person in his life who’s referred to him that way.

Derek chuckles softly, as if he knows what Stiles is thinking, and tugs at his captured arms as if to remind him who’s in control. This time Stiles remains lax, doesn’t try to push.

They hold still for a beat, two, more, while Derek waits to be sure Stiles is listening, testing him. He feels poured into his current posture, liquid and malleable, anchored by the press around the bones of his wrists, the solid muscle under his jaw and between his thighs, the pulsing song of his own cock.

“So good,” Derek rumbles through the soft growl that hasn’t stopped, that keeps his chest vibrating against Stiles’. “So good for me. I’m going to give you a reward, okay? It’s been a hard day, and you did so well. I want to give you what you need.” He dips his head until his cheek rests against Stiles’, rubs an electric, sandpaper burn across Stiles’ jaw, the tender underside of his throat, and more gently still, across his neck, so delicate that there is hardly any pressure on the abused tissue there, only the light drag of bristles, the humid heat of his breath.

Stiles shivers, in a good way, and waits, content and hazy in his submission, wonders distantly exactly what Derek thinks he needs.

Then there is an arm at his belly, a hand on his waistband, deftly unbuttoning and unzipping, unerringly finding the straining flesh of his cock, straightening it out and tugging it free, pushing the cotton of his underpants out of the way. Stiles opens his mouth and sucks in air at the feeling of someone else touching his dick, giving it a stroke firm and sure and scattering sensation through him like fireworks under his skin.

His inability to speak is so frustrating, but he presses his head harder into Derek, curves his back and tilts his hips forward, his body speaking for him, humming under Derek’s touch. *Oh my god, Derek, that feels so good, Don’t stop-*

“Fuck,” Derek mutters. “Fuck. Stiles. You smell so- You.” He twitches away to thumb at his own jeans, opening the fly and unceremoniously drawing out his cock.

Even Stiles’ human nose can detect the musk of their arousal in the air. He presses his open mouth against Derek’s skin when Derek’s hand wraps around him again, holding both their cocks together, and Stiles can feel the heat of him, the faint bristle of pubic hair, the firm grip of his hand as he squeezes them together. He lets go only for a moment, moving his palm to Stiles’ cheek. “Lick it,” he orders, voice rough, and Stiles transfers his oral fixation to the palm against his lips, licking and sucking at the mounds beneath the fingers, tongue arrowing against the webbing between each, delicate even on such a strong man. He licks up the length of each digit, gladly sucking when Derek slips a few into his mouth, groaning again and tugging on Stiles’ bound wrists as he does so.

When he holds their cocks again it’s with a wet slide, only briefly cool before heating up against their flesh. “Rock into it, baby,” he whispers. “Show me what you like.”

And Stiles does, soft and entranced, pushing closer, gracelessly humping, dazed by the sensations, the tug and pull against his skin, the swipe of Derek's thumb across both their crowns, the relentless squeeze of his fist. His arms are safely behind him, pinning him here, and his face is buried in Derek's heat and strength.

He has no choices. No need to think. Here, in this dark cell, so far removed from everything in his previous life, Stiles doesn't consider that this is the first time anyone's touched him this way, beyond a disjointed *feels so good*. He doesn't debate whether it's right or wrong. He simply lets go, tumbled in the overwhelming surf of sensation. Breathing in his Dom and eagerly following where he's lead.

Derek takes control of his rut, guiding him by pushing on the hands behind his back, encouraging Stiles into a rhythmic roll, fucking into Derek's fist, the catch and drag of skin against skin becoming the focus of his world.

Derek whispers *Yeah, like that, God Stiles, yeah, fuck*, the words floating around Stiles as he rocks his hips, strains for release, feeling the muscles of Derek's legs under his own, working in rhythm, bunching and stretching against the sensitive backs of Stiles thighs.

Derek's chest heaves against his own with each gasp and groan, and he begins pulling at Stiles' arms when his strokes lose rhythm, pace increasing into a something more frantic. "Come on, Stiles. Come on, baby. You can come. Come on. Come for me, baby. *Come*."

And Stiles does, lifting his heavy head and arching backwards, feeling lightning stream from his balls through his dick, jetting against Derek's hand, his cock, silently spattering come on his belly.

"Yes," Derek growls. "Yes, like that. Soo good." And when Stiles suddenly goes lax, Derek releases Stiles' wrists to hold him around the shoulders and back of his head instead, supporting him before he topples backwards; and then Stiles feels Derek coming, the spasms of his cock as it rubs against Stiles own, only now softening, the heat and dampness of semen painting his belly, trickling between Derek's fingers.

Stiles collapses, loose and relaxed, giving his full weight over to Derek's hold around his back. It doesn't occur to him that this might be too much to support, one-handed, and Derek doesn't complain. They're both still for long moments, shuddering with the occasional aftershock, Derek's fist still around their oversensitized cocks.

"God, Stiles," Derek breathes finally. "That was...." There's another pause. "So fucking irresponsible."

Stiles doesn't move, still vague and blissful. Derek twists to lie him down, and he jolts unhappily at the cold concrete under his back. But Derek slides next to him immediately, kissing his shoulder and then biting gently at his neck. Stiles lifts a floppy hand to grab onto ... what's under his palm ... a bicep.

Derek slides down a bit until he's mouthing at Stiles chest, licking and sucking at the skin of his abdomen, and Stiles realizes he's licking up their come. He doesn't have a judgment on that at the moment, still unable to think, enmired in a potent combination of pleasure and subspace. It's cool and wet following where Derek licks; he finishes up with long swipes across Stiles' cock before he tucks him back into his underpants, tugs his jeans up enough to refasten them.

After a few sounds that likely mean Derek doing the same for himself, Stiles is lifted into Derek's arms and Derek knee-walks to another wall. "I can't believe we just did that right next to the fucking *toilet*," he mutters. "I can't believe we just did that at all."

Stiles is deeply unconcerned, and when Derek lies them down next to another wall, he just turns on his side so that as little of his skin as possible is on the cold floor and drapes himself half across Derek's chest, a leg thrown over Derek's and his face buried in Derek's neck.

The grumbled imprecations are contradicted by Derek's body, which curls around Stiles, tugging him closer, keeping him warm and safe. His hands rub along Stiles' back, test his wrists to be sure they're not bruised, thumb gently at the muscles of his shoulders, which are not sore at all from being held forward while his arms were caught behind him. Little aches that had begun to reassert themselves are drained almost before they can complain, and Stiles drops quickly back to sleep.

Derek dreams of running, paws silent in the humus of the forest. Golden light sifts through green leaves, dappling the floor below, and Derek darts between tree trunks and bounces over a small creek. His pack is behind him, yipping and howling in their play. Another wolf runs beside him, his mate, lithe and energetic, dashing away just to return with a head-butt, trying to bowl him over. Derek doesn't fall, of course, but chases his mate through some brambles and around a large boulder before catching him, delighting in the hunt.

When he catches him, has his mate pinned to the ground, staring up at him with mischievous golden eyes, jaws agape and tongue lolling in a wolfy grin, Derek lifts his head to howl. Pack bonds purr in his heart, warm and vibrant, the strongest and brightest of them tied to the wolf under his paws.

The pack sings back to him, calling out their loyalty and their joy. When Derek noses at his mate, encouraging him to howl as well with a short bark, his mate lifts his head and opens his mouth.

But no howl bursts free.

The wolf strains and their gaze meets in confusion and fear; all Derek hears is a harsh, choking wheeze. Clouds pass over the sun, and suddenly it's winter, cold and barren. His mate is silent between his paws, dark against the frost-covered land, limp and emaciated. Derek whines and noses at him, *Get up, get up and play* and howls for his pack, but the bonds are gone, his heart is cold and vacant, and his mate's eyes are glazing over, going dark and brown.

Chapter End Notes

Feel better now? (Aside from that dream, I mean. Heh. Wonder what that portends?) Next chapter has hand-feeding and washing, so there's more floofy goodness to come.

Hand Feeding - An Elemental Dance of Service and Submission

Chapter Notes

Hullo my darlings. Here's your new chapter. It's unbeta'd because I honestly almost forgot entirely to post it, much less send it off to Domachenkov. I injured my back almost two weeks ago, doing yardwork, dammit, and life's pretty much been hell since then. (Sorry about all the unanswered comments! I read and love them, I promise you.) So I'm basically flat on my back and still taking opiates on 4-hour intervals. That means I likely won't get to comments for this chapter, too, but please don't let that stop you! I love to read them, I really do. And now lets all take a moment to be thankful that I have so much buffer in this story, so y'all can continue to get your updates uninterrupted, even if it is a little rough.

Derek startles awake, reflexively clutching the warm body that lies slack across his own. He's in his beta form already, instinctively holding his claws away from tender human skin. Only the faintest of gray shadows indicates that it must be morning outside their cell. He takes a deep breath and allows the shift to fade away, all but the eyes.

Stiles has crawled fully on top of him in the night, making Derek his warm soft mattress against the unforgiving floor. Derek can't scoff at that being a human weakness, as he himself is stiff and aching from the cold. He's content to be the boy's buffer, to keep Stiles from suffering even more. He skims his hand up Stiles' back to his neck, bumping gently over sharp ribs and raised scabs, lissome skin hot from bruising. The sub's neck is in poor shape, far too swollen to permit access the collar, and the flesh that swells around the leather feels cool and deadened. There is a faint rasp to his breathing that is new, and worrisome.

Derek pulls Stiles' pain without making a conscious decision to do so, hand cupping around the abused neck, and Stiles twitches and nuzzles at him for a moment before relaxing back into deep sleep. Derek frowns a little, tracing the crimped shell of Stiles' ear, pacing his small caress to the torpid *thump thump* of Stiles' heart.

He queasily recalls his dream, the dying wolf and the bright new bond. What he did last night was so outrageously stupid he doesn't even have words for his self-recrimination. He can feel it when he focuses: a new bond among the scanty network that makes up his pack. There's Isaac, timid and reactionary; Boyd is sure and steady; Erica, fervent and unpredictable. He can perceive that all of them are fiercely worried about their Alpha, but are otherwise healthy and unharmed, for which he's grateful. He hopes they stay that way.

But deeper even than these three packlinks is the fledgeling bond, soft and new, its faint glow compelling and incalculably dear to Derek already. A sub bond. A mate bond. He kicks a heel furiously against the floor (careful not to disturb the sleeping boy). He'd known that very first night that they had the potential for bonding, when he'd caught the frantic sub in his arms and was helpless but to offer comfort and control. He could sense Stiles reaching out, feral with need and fear, and knew it was their compatibility that made him so easy to soothe, even in such a dire environment.

When human Dom and subs form a pair, their bond is feeble, broken if not with ease than with a little effort, a thing that only bleeds for a while. The nexus of a werewolf D/s bond is much stronger and more elemental, something physical that is rooted in hormones and heartstrings. Breaking such a connection is nearly impossible and irreparably damaging to both parties, if they should survive at all. For an Alpha, the bond is stronger yet, woven in with *mate* and *pack* and *need*.

Last night he and Stiles had scened, in a small (but very satisfying!) way: a few orders and rudimentary constraints. He'd been aware of Stiles slipping under, had deliberately coaxed him further down with each simple command (*don't bite, stay still, lick*).

When Stiles had first awakened, his subdrop was manifest in shaking and disorientation, cold sweat and fear; his psychological state announced itself with an unmistakable chlorinated funk that had Derek literally wrinkling his nose. Confronted with such a pitiable sight, Derek simply *had* to offer to take control from Stiles in a way that wouldn't harm him, as he had been hurt all day... for many days. He couldn't resist the urge to Dom the boy, and to do it right, with the care he required, to calm his racing heart and escalating terror. To nurture the faint natural scent of him to it's a healthful gingery bouquet. To soothe the injuries that Stiles' coerced compliance had cost him through the day. He'd been savagely violated, in a way no sub should ever be, and Derek had two days' worth of clamoring instincts to *hold* and to *claim* and *protect*.

And Stiles had responded so *quickly*, intoxicating Derek with his arousal and trust. His mouth on Derek's neck was the final straw, breaking the bulwark of Derek's determined distance. If the boy had bitten him, Derek wouldn't have been able to stop himself from biting back, completing their claim on one another, which he *knows* is unacceptable.

The poor kid has a life of his own, and he is *so young*. If they get out, he needs to be free to make his own choices, rather than be tied to an emotionally damaged Alpha when he'd never even been exposed to werewolves before. Not mated to a man who would be a reminder of the worst time of his life. A nonhuman.

And yet.

The mating bond had blossomed anyway, subtle and determined, like a crocus in February, unfurling a delicate shoot in the stink of their cell and watered with blood and sweat and come.

Derek groans softly. What a clusterfuck. He should move away from the boy now, prevent the bond from growing stronger. But he can't make himself dump the kid on the cold floor, and instead stares blindly at the ceiling, feeling the rise and fall of Stiles' back with each strained breath, the long slim length of him pressed trustingly atop Derek's body, all the way down to his cold, bare feet which dangle vulnerably next to Derek's boots.

Later, when they are both awake, sitting awkwardly a few feet from each other and staring silently into the dark, Derek recalls the box that had been tossed in the cell yesterday afternoon sometime before he was returned from his fucking electric fence.

"Are you hungry?" he asks.

Stiles flails violently in shock at the breaking of their long silence. They haven't said anything yet this morning. Well, Derek hasn't said anything yet, and Stiles is incapable. He'd gently moved the boy off of him once he'd awakened, and gone to drink water from the sink, take a piss and move his stiff muscles. He wasn't avoiding the sub, not at all. Just needed to move around a bit.

Stiles, being completely blind in the darkness, hadn't tried one of his gestured conversations. He stayed still, where Derek put him, and practiced his silent breathing. Derek could hear his erratic heart, smell the shame and confusion radiating from him in notes of resin and vinegar, and it made him feel worse. So. Avoidance.

Stiles shakes his head in response to the query, although he cannot know that Derek can see that. Derek ignores it anyway, goes to the box and opens the flaps. Plunging his hand into the loudly crinkling bag inside, he encounters Cheerios. The unflavored kind, he realizes when he shoves a handful into his mouth, and grimaces. This must be what he heard Rudy complaining about yesterday, *disgusting baby food, what the hell, Gunner*. At least it's food, though, and he hasn't eaten in three days or more, and doesn't know how long it's been for Stiles.

The crunching is embarrassingly loud, echoing inside his head and off the concrete block walls. Derek quickly swallows his mouthful half-chewed, tired of listening to himself. He grabs another handful and moves over to Stiles, crouching in front of him. "Here," he says, pulling Stiles' hand forward and dumping the cereal in it. Stiles is still shaking his head, which Derek doesn't understand. "Stiles, you need to eat." The bond purrs in his chest, the simple act of taking care of his sub setting off a chemical cascade that he fruitlessly struggles to suppress. Derek waits for a moment, but Stiles doesn't move. His mouth is hanging half open, as it often does, painting a darker shadow across his face. Derek lifts a few pieces and pops them into Stiles' open mouth, and then presses a finger across his lip. "Eat," he commands.

Stiles' free hand comes up to grip at Derek's wrist, doesn't try to move it, just holds there. His mouth closes and Derek slides his fingers around to the point of his jaw, waiting.

Obediently, Stiles chews.

And chews.

And chews.

Every once in awhile he stops, but he can't seem to swallow, making aborted gulping sounds before chewing more. His fingers are tight around Derek's arm. A camphoraceous tang slowly bleeds into the cell: Stiles is stressed and unhappy.

"Do you need water?" Derek asks at last, confused, because he *knows* the boy is starving. "Is it too dry?"

Stiles nods and scrambles up, using Derek's arm and the wall to stand. He is shaky, and yesterday's bruises dislike the motion, Stiles' scent spiking suddenly with pain. His handful of Cheerios patter to the floor, and he crunches across them when Derek leads him to the sink, surreptitiously drawing out pain with the hand on Stiles' arm. Once there, Stiles shakes Derek off, and so he steps back to watch him fumble with the tap and cup his hand under the water that comes out.

Stiles gets some in his mouth and then straightens up, standing very still, head tipped back a little. Derek can hear the water in his mouth, swished gently around: lots of room to spare, so not a large mouthful. Finally Stiles cups his hand over his throat and begins to swallow, the gulping noise of

his throat working is slow and frequently aborted, and Stiles body flinches with each attempt, as if it's causing him great pain.

Derek steps forward again immediately, curling his own hand around Stiles', making space for his own fingers to slide to slide against the cold skin of Stiles' throat. He draws the pain, which is sharp, knifelike with each swallow, and Stiles, who had gone tense and sweaty, sags back against him in relief. He wants more water, now that it doesn't hurt so badly to drink; scoops it in his hands and lets it trickle down his throat in tiny amounts.

He snaps his fingers and scrabbles at Derek's hand after a moment, holding it out and open, tapping it a few times, but Derek can't figure out what he wants. Finally he huffs a little and turns around, crouching down and feeling for the wall. He shuffles slowly to where they'd been sitting, and the hand he has brushing the floor hits the mess of crumbled bits of cereal that he'd stepped on. He begins to sweep it up, collecting what he can into his palm, and now Derek realizes what he's after.

"Here, stop. Stiles." He bends to grab the box and pushes it gently to Stiles' chest. "Here. Take the box." Stiles keeps what's been gathered from the floor, though, which is a grim reminder of how often he's been fed. He does add another small handful from the box before setting it carefully aside and aiming to shuffle back to the sink. Derek is frustrated watching him be so blind, at this point, and just steps behind him, lifting him up at the armpits, and depositing him in front of the sink, turning on the tap. Stiles slaps at his hands, and Derek grins a little as he dodges the blow. "You want to eat them with water? That makes it easier on your throat?"

Stiles nods, and carefully scoots his fingers toward the stream of water, so that it trickles gently over his thumb, not forceful enough to wash the cereal away. He waits until the mess in his hands is nothing more than paste before he licks it up, tipping his head back with each stuttering effort.

"Okay," Derek says when he's done with that first handful, rinsing Stiles' hands under the stream of water before turning it off. "Okay, that's fine. Sit down, Stiles, and I'll do it. You want more?"

Stiles hesitates before nodding, and Derek dearly wishes he could see his expression. He smells of trepidation, smells shy and curious and eager all at once. Derek scoops him back to where they'd been sitting before, walking the boy backwards and then catching his foot behind him so that Stiles trips and falls, giving his weight over to Derek's arms, who guides him gently to the floor, ignoring the startled flail when he thought he'd fall. "Sit," Derek says. And then, chiding, "I won't let you fall."

Derek soaks another handful of Cheerios until it becomes mush (which takes a surprisingly long time, and he absently wonders what cereal companies add so that your bowl isn't utterly dissolved in milk by the time you finish). He kneels in front of Stiles and lifts his hand to brush against Stiles' pouting lower lip. Stiles licks his thumb first, the sultry contact sparking a jolt of arousal and corresponding increase in temperature through Derek, which he manfully ignores.

Stiles doesn't try to use his own hands, just rests them against Derek's as he laps delicately at the food, only drawing in tiny bites at a time, and then going through the long process of swallowing. Derek can blunt the sharp edge of pain, but he cannot reduce the swelling, and it's clear from the whistling of his breath that Stiles has only a very tiny passage to work with. His tongue is broad and flat, the first blush of self-consciousness quickly faded into a slowly sated hunger, and he licks messily across Derek's palm, sucking at his sensitive skin without any idea of what it's doing to Derek's libido.

He feeds Stiles this way, multiple trips between the sink and kneeling down, caring for his sub. The bond hums and grows brighter with each stroke of Stiles' tongue on his palm, the press of his fingers, trusting and tight against his wrist, with the troubled working of his throat to swallow it down. Derek gives and gives, in a service-stoked stupor, all of his focus on the sub before him, on the extent of his need, the beauty of his submission, the fragility of his trust. The alluring scent of him, ginger and citrus and loam. The hot and agile muscle of his tongue. The deceptive delicacy of hands which are actually very strong, to withstand what has happened to him in captivity.

Their hearts are slow and beating in synch, so attuned is each to the other in this elemental dance of service and submission.

When Stiles finishes, pushing Derek's hand down and slumping exhausted against the wall, Derek rises once more to get the shirt on the side of the sink, wetting it and stroking it against Stiles' sweat-limned face, for eating took significant effort.

Stiles' languor spurs him on, and Derek draws the cloth down each slender arm, brushing away the filth and abuse from yesterday. With each pass of his hand, he claims that Stiles is *his*: his to cherish and his to service and his to protect. It's baptismal, in a way, both of them figuratively naked before the other, each unguarded and exposed, both wrapped inside the bubble they've created. Derek wets the cloth again before running it over Stiles' chest, swiping the lean muscle stretching from sternum to the rounded ball of each shoulder, trailing it down the center of his abdomen, soft and vulnerable, butting against the waistband of his jeans before tipping Stiles forward to continue the ablutions across the broad expanse of his back.

Stiles holds on to the rag when Derek finishes, tugs it from his hand and then stuffs a corner in his mouth, sucking gently, making little squeedgy noises as he pulls water from the fabric to drink.

“Okay,” Derek says stupidly. “Okay.” And his dick is *so hard* in his pants, brain marinated in the intoxicating cocktail of his hormones, caring this way for his sub, his mate. Something visceral in him reacts to Stiles nursing on his undershirt, saturated as it is in his scent, the sweat of his body, no matter how many times they've rinsed it out.

Both hands are on Stiles, moving over his shoulders and arms, and Derek can't bring himself to let go. He swings to the side and sits against the wall, pulling Stiles around to settle between his legs, tugging and arranging him until he's curled against Derek's chest, his head nestled against Derek's shoulder, his hip crushing an erection that Derek has no interest in attending.

Stiles heartbeat is slow, so slow, and steady, almost as if he were sleeping, and his body is entirely pliant as Derek molds him to his own frame. Derek knows that Stiles must be floating in his own chemical cocktail, having handed the care of himself to a Dom he trusts, with whom he has a *bond*, dammit.

But Derek's misgivings about bonding have no place here: nature's call is too strong. He rumbles continuously, content and proud, his sub in his arms, happy and well-tended. Running almost exclusively on instinct, Derek settles in to scent his mate, rubbing his jaw along Stiles' temple and hair, tipping his head further to slide their cheeks together, pulling pain as he goes, ignoring the cold touch of the wet shirt, rubbing his hands everywhere his face can't touch: arms and chest and back, thigh and calf, cupping around the cold feet.

... Later, he thinks that it's a good thing they had this moment, timeless and removed from their present circumstances. Because what happens next is so so much worse.

BAD STUFF

Chapter Notes

Alright, my delicate darlings. This chapter is titled ‘Bad Stuff’ for a reason. This is the chapter I’ve been warning you about since the beginning of the story. There is torture, abuse, homophobic language and sexual assault. (See [link](#) if you need more detail.) It isn’t pretty.

In fact, this is downright brutal, folks, I’m not gonna lie. If it’s any consolation, however, please know that this is the last chapter of the sort, the absolute nadir of our tale. If you need to skip it, then please do so. Shoot me an email (MojoflowerWrites at gmail) and I’ll summarize, in very broad strokes, what you missed.

And you must all thank [Domachenkov](#), who told me to add the first bit of Chapter 10 (even though it’s a draft) because it would be “a light at the end of the tunnel, which I think this chapter could use - it’s a lot of unrelenting misery/trauma otherwise.” Yeah. I was just gonna leave you all hanging for two weeks, so give her kittens and chocolate and all the good things.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Laxmi and Baron are on duty when Derek opens his eyes, already tense and jerking from the burning current running through the fence to his body. He grits his teeth, determined not to cry out, and he’s sure as hell not going to beg. His eyes sweep the room immediately, seeking Stiles, but he’s not there, only the hunter leader and her second.

They don’t give Derek an opportunity to wonder what’s going on with the sub. Their questions are consistent, *Where is your pack, What are their weaknesses, When and how did you turn them, Tell us about Alpha powers*. Their torture is matter of fact and unoriginal: cuts and burns, salt and lemon juice. They whip him with the connector end of a cable wire until he’s a mass of blood and bruising, keeping his eyes tightly closed to prevent himself from being blinded. (It’s a blessing the electricity forces him into beta shift, because his brow is heavier, offering more protection to his vulnerable eyes; and his skin is stronger and thicker, taking more effort to cut and bruise.)

Derek can’t remain silent, roaring through his pain, shouting and cursing when he can catch enough breath to do so. He digs up a little sass and makes up shit for their questions: the betas are in a beach house in Malibu, they’re all allergic to silver (which the hunters know to be a lie), Alphas can read minds. After what feels like hours, his resistance degenerates into gasped *Fuck yous*, and his eyes are rolling around in his head, and he’s distantly wondering if he’ll die, because he can hardly heal while he’s being shocked, and the damage has come thick and fast.

There’s an extended break, which Derek spends with his head dropped to his chest, staring blearily at blood dripping onto his boots. Laxmi and Baron discuss something, and the bizarrely incongruous hiss of a coffee maker starts up. Coffee break. Oh, god, that’s funny. Derek ponders for a while on union rules for torturers: 15 minutes every two hours and an hour for lunch. He chuckles a little, but the sound is quiet and garbled. He thinks he might sleep for a while, even.

Gunner and Rudy saunter in some time later, Stiles shuffling behind them with his head bowed down. He’s completely naked, and new marks stand out livid and bleeding on pale skin. Someone

has used a crop or something on him, and viciously, too. His lip bleeds and his nose looks broken.

Gunner throws himself into a chair at the table, facing Laxmi. "Quiet in town," he reports. And without a pause, "On your knees, boy!" he calls to Stiles, who blankly folds himself to hands and knees in front of him, not even flinching when spurred boots thump heavily onto his back. His ass is red and purple with bruising, vivid lines chaotically drawn across him and seeping red. Gunner hangs his hat on Stiles' head. "Don't let it fall, boy." And so Stiles has to keep his head upright, straining the front of his neck. Derek can hear the whistling wheeze of his breath even over the singing electrical current that wraps around him.

Derek glares at them all murderously, but makes no sound, gutted with anguish over the sanguineous evidence of Stiles' treatment, with fury at himself for not even hearing it take place over the sounds of his own torture. He'd had no clue.

"What's the Sheriff doing?" Laxmi asks, pushing aside her coffee. "Did you deliver our message?" She looks less put together than she had been earlier. Her hair is tousled and sweat-dampened at the hairline. There is blood on her forearm and shirt. (Torture is hard physical labor, after all. Needs coffee breaks.)

"What'd y'all put in the video?" Baron asks. He idly rubs at one massive hand with a napkin, erasing smears of red.

"The usual," Gunner answers. "Crawled the boy around a little, gave him a beating. Had him show a few tricks and then left him dropped and glassy-eyed."

"We were right there when he got it, at that little deli he always goes to for lunch." Rudy grins, savage and chilling. "Daddy didn't like seeing his little boy like that, I can tell you."

"You sent that video to the Sheriff *while you were in his sight?*" Laxmi's voice is cold and angry. She rises, snatching up the cable, and whips it across the table, where it wraps around Gunner's shoulder and bites into his back. He shrieks and flails, drawing backward so fast his spurs gouge deep scores into Stiles' back, launching himself out of his chair violently enough that Stiles is knocked onto his side.

"What the *fuck*, lady?" Gunner yells, standing now, one hand wrapped around himself, trying to feel the damage. "What the *hell* did you do that for?"

"You'll be lucky to just get that if the Sheriff figures you idiots out." Laxmi snaps the cable into the corner of the room furiously. "You were only supposed to tell the man to keep his head down and his fucking blinders on or his kid would pay the price. You were *not* supposed to sit the next table over when he got the message, goggling like the fucking clowns that you are." She leans on the table, staring at Gunner and Rudy. "If he follows you here," she says slowly. "I will kill you both. And it won't be quick."

Rudy tries to make himself invisible, and Gunner blusters, "He won't. We were just eating at the deli, man. We weren't being suspicious..."

Laxmi freezes him with a glare. "Shut. Up."

There's a long moment when no one moves except Stiles, who curls up a little, fingers twitching.

"Baron. Go to town and see what's going on, do damage control if you can. I'm going to call Willis." She glances at Derek for a minute and then dismisses him to glare at the other two Hunters. "You stupid shits stay *right here*. Do not go anywhere."

Both of them nod, and Baron says "Yes, ma'am," as he brushes past them all to go up the stairs.

Laxmi keeps the two men butterflied on her disgusted stare for a moment longer before dropping her gaze. She seems to notice the blood on her arms and curls her lip. "And then I'm going to the motel for a shower. I'll call you later. Do *not* fuck up." She strides past them both and takes the stairs two at a time. Soon after that, two cars start up and drive away.

Rudy immediately begins to protest. "It wasn't *my* idea to be there. That's all on you, Gunner. I should have—"

"Shut up, asshole," Gunner mutters, kicking at his chair. "Just shut up. He didn't see us. It doesn't matter. God fucking *damn* it." He rubs again where the cable hit and snarls. "This job sucks."

Stiles twitches again, and Gunner's attention is drawn back to him. He stalks over and plucks his hat off the floor. "I thought I told you to keep this on your head, *sub*. You can't even do that right. You're a fucking disgrace to your kind, you pussy little cocksucker." He bends to hook one finger through the D-ring on the collar and pulls up, Stiles desperately scrambling to rise without choking, eyes wide and terrified.

Before he's even straightened out Gunner slams him face-down on the table, bent in half, cheek and ear sliding through spilled coffee. Stiles' hands twist back to pull at Gunner's arms, and Derek can't stand it. He howls, long and furious and growls through his fangs, "Get your fucking hands off him!"

When Gunner first jerks around he looks scared, but then he realizes that Derek's safely chained up, and a broad grin covers his face. He leans his hand down on Stiles' face for a minute, crushing it into the table, and then turns to Rudy. "Hold him down," he says, and Rudy grins as well, stepping up to hold Stiles' head down.

For a single moment, there is no sound in the room except the whistling gasps that Stiles makes as he fights for air.

Gunner licks his thin lips. "We got your boyfriend, you repulsive fucking animal? Think you can help him?" He drags his hand across Stiles' back and stops with it on the curve of his ass. "You think this ass is *yours*, Alpha Hale? This lowlife waste of space?" He reaches down further and grabs Stiles' buttcheeks pulling them apart to reveal his hole. "This asshole here? You think you own this, you dog?"

Stiles jerks and begins to struggle, tearing at Rudy's hands and then flailing backward to hit at Gunner when Rudy doesn't budge. He kicks and pushes with his legs, until Gunner slaps him hard, right across all the blood and bruises of his earlier beating, hissing, "Be still or I'll hurt you bad."

Rudy pulls on the collar's ring until Stiles is choking, goes limp from lack of air, and Derek is so enraged he's gone nonverbal, snarling and growling like the animal Gunner called him, wrenching at his chains until his wrists bleed, furious at the electricity that keeps him weakened.

Gunner picks a Sharpie off the table taps it on his teeth, looking straight at Derek. "Wish he was yours, furball? You wanna fuck this?" He writes *SUBSLUT* across Stiles ass, ink tracing messily

across welts and blood. Then he caps the pen and looks back at Derek. “You wanna put your dog dick right in here?” He pries Stiles open with one hand and rests the pen cap first against his asshole. “You like boy pussy?”

Derek thinks they could make him bleed all day, literally peel the skin from his bones and it would not hurt this much. He bellows with impotent ferocity as Gunner jams the pen halfway inside the boy; Stiles jolts and struggles, but he can't move, pinned down by both men. Gunner grins and grins, and pistons the pen in and out a few times, laughing at Derek's face and his helplessness. A small thread of blood begins to trickle down Stiles' thigh.

Almost nonchalantly, Gunner jams the pen in all the way, slaps it in place with a sharp blow and then saunters up to Derek. “You're *both* fucking abominations,” he hisses, grin falling into a twisted expression. “You need to be put down for the good of all society.” He grabs the lemon juice from the workbench and takes off the lid. “You're disgusting.” He upends the remaining half-bottle over Derek's head, laughing as he snarls and snaps at him. “Ah ah, no biting, puppy.”

Derek's hisses a breath through his teeth, overwhelmed by the smell of lemons, the sting in his eyes and the flaring burn of all the open cuts on his body. Gunner chuck's the plastic bottle aside and then whirls around to drag Stiles off the table and fling him into a corner. The boy goes down like a stringless puppet, dropping hard to his ass (which has to hurt, god, it has to hurt, because the pen is still in there), catching himself on the wall before he falls over completely. His mouth is open in a silent scream, and Derek howls again.

“Stay. There.” Gunner spits at Stiles. “And don't move. Or I'll start breaking all your fingers.” He paces wildly back and forth for a few minutes, clearly so worked up he can hardly stand it. The air in the small room is crackling with violence and urgency, ricocheting from one body to the next, growing in intensity as it does so.

Gunner is visibly shaking from it. He runs his hands through his thinning hair and shouts. “Fuck! Fuck!” He wheels around and then darts over to Derek and punches him hard in the stomach. “Fuck!” He's not trying to hurt Derek so much as he's blowing off steam. “I'm gonna go get a beer.” He rages up the stairs and leaves the three others silent and breathing hard in a room sizzling with fear and fury and blood.

Rudy watches Derek, his wide eyes bright and sly. There's no expression on his face as his gaze slides slowly to the corner where Stiles huddles, not having moved a muscle. He glances upward, where Gunner is pacing back and forth directly overhead, the sharp crack of a poptop indicating that he's got his beer. Rudy rubs his hand across the front of his pants and Derek is appalled to see the bulge of an erection there. “No,” he breathes, not daring to say it too loud, in case that should make his abhorrent suspicion come true.

Rudy doesn't say anything, just sidles over to Stiles' corner, unzipping his pants and pulling his cock through the tab. “*No!*” Derek shouts. “Stop it! Don't-” But Rudy grabs Stiles neck, his mouth already open, struggling for air.

“You a cocksucker,” Rudy mumbles. “And I got a cock, here.” Stiles slams his mouth closed and tries to turn his head, but Rudy holds him still. “You fucking take this all pretty-like,” he says harshly. “Or I'm gonna castrate your friend, there, and feed *his* cock to you, get it?”

Derek can see Stiles' eyelashes, long and dark and clumped together with tears. “Stiles-”

Rudy uses his hold to knock Stiles head hard against the wall and then shakes him a little before wrenching his jaw open. “Come on, *subslut*: suck.”

And with that he jabs his hips forward, driving his cock into Stiles’ mouth, relentless and fast. Derek shouts and growls and begs, but Rudy just thrusts, each forward movement cracking Stiles head back into the wall.

“He can’t breathe,” Derek screams. “He. Can’t. Breathe.” It’s only been a handful of seconds, but Stiles’ face is red already, beginning to purple, and Derek hears erratic thundering of his heart, too rapid to do its job.

Derek’s guts are churning and there’s nothing but ice running through his veins, terror and wrath and helplessness choking him as he watches Stiles struggle to draw in a breath.

Gunner clatters downstairs to see what the fuss is about and after stopping in confusion, seems to sort out what Rudy is doing. He pelts his beer can at the back of Rudy’s head: “What the *fuck* are you doing, man?” Rudy thrusts one last time as Gunner grabs him by the neck of his shirt and pulls him back, swinging him over by the table. “Oh, gross, are you queer? Tell me you’re not a faggot.”

Rudy has his hand wrapped around his dick and a shocked expression on his face at being interrupted. “Uh, no, man-”

“You’re a pervert,” Gunner pronounces disgustedly. “Get your fucking gay on somewhere else, man, and put your dong away. I don’t want to see that shit.” Rudy looks sheepish, and struggles to stuff his still-stiff cock back into his pants. “And go wash your hands,” Gunner continues, dropping into a chair. “Use soap, ‘cause that shit’s nasty. And bring me another beer.”

Rudy slinks off and Gunner leans back in the chair, glaring at the ceiling. Derek is silent, panting and shaking. Stiles is curled in the corner, slumped a little sideways off his knees, one shoulder jammed against the wall. He clutches his throat, trying to breathe, and Derek wants to rip off a limb for each tear that tracks down his face. He stares at Stiles, *Look at me, look at me, honey. I’m gonna help, I’m gonna take care of you. Let me make it better.* And inside he seeks the fledgling bond, caressing it and loving it and offering strength and support and hopes it’ll get through.

Stiles lifts his head a little, face bone white now instead of blue, and stares back, clinging to Derek’s gaze like a lifeline. *Help me. Help. Help, Derek, please. Help.*

Rudy comes back downstairs and tosses a can at Gunner just as Gunner’s phone dings with a message. They both crack open their beers before Gunner checks his phone.

“Is it Laxmi?” Rudy asks, sitting down.

“She says Mr. Willis might be here tomorrow.”

“Why do he want the Alpha alive?” Rudy asks, apparently having decided that ignoring the last ten minutes is the wisest way to proceed.

“Something about being sick. Said old man Argent knew a trick for cancer.”

“Old man Argent is dead,” Rudy replies pragmatically. “Whatever his trick was didn’t work, duh.” He idly fingers the patterns shaved into his hair and slams half of his beer, burping afterwards with

a satisfied air.

“Meh,” Gunner leans back and throws his feet up on the table, propping one jangling boot over the other. “Something about the bite of an Alpha curing all that ails you.”

Neither man even glances at the corner where Stiles huddles and quakes, and Derek clenches and releases his fists, again and again, forcing himself to be silent and still, cringing at the odor of cheap beer and aluminum can, a greasy underscore to the rank fear and trauma that still permeates the basement.

“Psht,” Rudy scratches at the side of his head. “Bite of an Alpha turns you into a werewolf, Gunner.”

“I know that, dumbass. But werewolves don’t get sick, right, don’t stay hurt.”

Rudy looks thoughtful. “But then we’d have to kill *him*, wouldn’t we? He’d be a howler.”

“Laxmi says he found a way to do it without turning.”

“Huh,” Rudy sounds doubtful

Gunner just shrugs. “It’s why we’ve got the electricity going on that Alpha there,” he adds. “I mean, it makes him weaker, but also, it keeps him in Beta form, and that’s when the bite has to happen or it won’t work.” He gives a full-body shake and flicks his empty can into the sink. “I need a smoke, man.”

“Yeah, I’ll come with,” Rudy throws his own can into the sink, and the slowing rattle as it comes to a rest follows the two men up the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

**** I know this chapter is pretty awful, but y’all should love it, because it’s the seed that started the whole story. I dunno... Stiles as a sub and the Sharpie and Derek unable to help. (I’m sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with my brain.) I had to write it out. And then it demanded 24k of intro. And some 150k after that. And you’ve gotta have as much comfort as hurt, that’s definitely my philosophy: I won’t stint on the comfort, it’ll just take a while to get there.

Also, thank you for all your lovely comments last time: every time I got a notice, my heart would soar. You’re the best, and I so delighted that you’ve stuck with me, and I promise to do better with responses this time around. (I can sit for more than 15 minutes these days, so I should be able to.)

Oh, and does anyone know why AO3 is adding spaces around anything I italicize? It’s so annoying! I don’t have time to go through and fix it now, sadly, I have to go do Mother things. :(

Aftermath and Escape

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles is lost in a sea of red. Not the dark, thick tint of blood, no. This is shining crimson, fierce and violently protective: he's looking across the room into Derek's eyes. And they're making him promises: comfort and safety and tenderness. He doesn't know how he knows that, but there it is. Red eyes and promises.

He knows abstractly that he's in shock. His body is icy and unresponsive. He can hardly feel the pain anymore, it's become so pervasive. He can't think. *Won't* think. Is terrified of thinking, of coming outside the wool wrapped around his mind. Those men. Both of them. They.

He knows... he knows there's something in his ass. And his mouth. Just. He can't. The taste, and the.... He can't think about it. Can't think. Clings to the red eyes and the promises, like the pair of them are nowhere, surrounded in mist, outside time and ugly reality. Not here. Not here, not here.

After a few minutes he rises slowly and hesitantly to his feet. Moving hurts. Hurts his muscles and his skin and the unyielding thing inside him and the brutal throbbing of his head. He's shaking so hard he can't walk straight, just kind of shudders and stumbles along, body treacherous and unreliable.

Derek is talking, but Stiles can't really listen; it's like hearing sound underwater, wavering and distorted. *Stiles, Stiles, are you alright? What are you doing?*

Stiles reels across the room, and each slap of his bare foot on the floor feels like it might shatter his bones. When he finally gets to Derek he pitches against him. He jolts at the first hot bite of electricity, but frankly it can hardly compete with the wreck of Stiles' body and the desperately maintained chasm of his mind. The current, filtered through Derek, becomes nothing more than the buzzing foundation of his shock.

Derek is chained a few inches above the ground, so Stiles' head flops forward onto his collarbone. Derek doesn't complain, just bends his own head to nuzzle at Stiles as much as he can, murmuring *Stiles, Stiles, Stiles* and brushing his jaw across Stiles' temple and fluttering little touches in his hair that might be kisses.

Utterly without coherent thought, Stiles parts his lips and sucks on skin, flooding his mouth with the taste of blood and sweat and lemon juice. It's good, it overwhelms the flavor of, the taste of. The. Of the... *thing* that had been in his mouth. His nose is sending him signals of searing pain, knocking against Derek's chest, but Stiles ignores it in favor of pressing closer and closer.

Stiles pushes hard against Derek's body with the entire length of his own, wishing Derek's arms were free, wishing he could be held tight. He desperately needs the safety and reassurance of a hug. He wants to crawl inside Derek's skin and never come out, protected by his Dom. He can't think about what happened. About anything but.

Bite. Stiles' sluggish mind presents him with a thought.

They had said biting could turn you, could heal you. And Stiles needs to be healed, needs to be stronger, needs to be able to fight back. So it never happens again. So he can't be used and forced and.

And.

He lifts his arm, bracing himself with the other hand firm on the thick muscle of Derek's chest, and shoves his forearm between Derek's teeth. Derek jerks in surprise, turns his head in an attempt to spit out Stiles' arm, but Stiles follows his movement, keeping it there; Derek is still clumsy and juddering under the constant onslaught of electricity.

"...-” Derek mumbles around him, and his face is twisted, and Stiles knows it's a question even though Derek has no eyebrows now to do his questioning for him. Beta form, they'd called it.

Stiles pushes closer, chest pressed against Derek's, careful not to touch the fence, feeling the rapid thumping of his heart under his skin, and lets his eyes beg. He snaps his teeth, over and over. *Bite, bite, Derek, I need you to bite me. Help me. Help. I need it. I need.*

And Derek's eyes soften when he realizes what Stiles wants, but Stiles can see the refusal before Derek even begins to shake his head, before a mumbled *No* can work around his arm. And Stiles is suddenly furious. Furious that he's so fucking weak, and furious that there's a way he can be helped and Derek won't do it. He won't *do* it. So Stiles slams heedlessly up with his other hand, punching under Derek's chin with all his strength, forcing him to involuntarily snap his jaws around Stiles' arm.

He gasps when fangs close over his skin, pushing through, tearing down through flesh and even into muscle before Derek can stop himself, before he untangles his teeth from Stiles' bleeding arm.

Stiles is satisfied, though, stares at the holes in his skin.

"Stiles," Derek murmurs. "Stiles, what have you done? What did I do? This isn't what you want. It can *kill* you, baby, it might kill you, and I can't—" He chokes himself off and Stiles just stands there, pushed up against him for a moment longer, shaking and sick and terrified and maybe a little bit smug that he managed to do one thing on his own since he'd been kidnapped. One thing that was *his choice*.

He pushes off Derek and staggers over to the fucking car battery those bastards had been using and rips the cables free, shoving the battery block onto the floor. He doesn't have a key for the manacles. Laxmi or Baron always keep the key. He can't do anything else, but at least he could stop the electricity. He falls to his knees, dizzy and faint, bending forward to catch himself on his hands before he topples over.

It is up to Derek now: Stiles is drained of the last of his energy.

The wire fence rattles, and he wearily lifts his head to watch as Derek twists and turns, fighting to free himself to a soundtrack of bitten off grunts and growls. Stiles hopes the man is stronger now, without being shocked. Hopes he can do *something*, because Stiles isn't even sure he can stand, much less run or fight.

Derek finally breaks free, tearing the fence rather than the manacles, angrily ripping random wires and flinging them aside as he lurches back to the floor. He leans against the table for a minute, heaving in breaths, eyes closed while he tries to gather himself. Stiles, safe in his dissociated state,

dispassionately notes the blood that streaks him, the places where flesh has separated to reveal shining white tissue beneath. Derek is badly hurt, probably worse off than even Stiles.

Maybe they'll never get free.

Derek eventually opens his eyes, turning immediately to Stiles. "Come on," he says, gently pulling him to his feet. "Let's go." His arm winds around Stiles' waist, carrying most of his weight, and Stiles stumbles beside him as they head up the stairs towards freedom.

Gunner and Rudy are just entering the kitchen door when Stiles and Derek exit the basement stairs, and Stiles almost wants to laugh at the how gobsmacked they look.

Derek immediately twists to prop Stiles against the wall before leaping forward with a roar, looming larger than life, fangs long and glinting in the kitchen light. Right now he looks every bit the monster their captors had called him, and Stiles is glad, *glad*, and thinks Derek is beautiful like this, primal and powerful and vicious.

Gunner, who is closest, is dead in seconds: Stiles watches, detached, while Derek scoops out most of his neck with long claws, flinging the tissue he'd come away with against the far wall and Gunner's body aside in the other direction.

Rudy screams, high and short, ending in an aborted burble as Derek punches straight through his chest. There's a brief moment, with Rudy's eyes wide and startled, his mouth opened mid-scream, and then blood pours out of it, coating his chin. Derek shakes the dying man off his arm with a single, jerking movement, like he's casting off something disgusting, shit or slime. His clawed hands twitch, as if he'd like to do more, before he breathes deeply and visibly struggles to shed his berserker fury. He stares at the two corpses for a moment, face blank but radiating satisfaction nonetheless.

"Come on," he says, pulling Stiles from the support of the wall and setting him on his feet. "Come on, we have to run."

Outside, Stiles can see that they were in a little cabin, and there is nothing to be seen in any direction he looks except for trees. The day is inappropriately sunny and bright, although it's cold enough for the steam of their breath to hang in the air. Stiles looks around helplessly, no idea where they are or where they should go. There are no cars, and who knows when the other two kidnappers will get back.

Derek lifts his head and huffs a few times, mouth open a bit, as if he's both scenting and tasting the air. He sets off purposefully towards the back side of the house, away from the driveway. "This way," he says. "We have to get out of here *now*."

And then it's just a long nightmare of fighting through brambles and slipping on pine needles. Stiles is still naked, his bare feet are getting cut on the twigs and things hidden in the leaves. He's still in shock, he thinks. Detached to the point of dissociation. He just stumbles, one foot after the other, focusing on the circle tattoo on Derek's back, how its margins shift with the movements of Derek's shoulders.

Step. Step. ‘Nother step. Don’t look up. Don’t think. Don’t feel.

He goes slower and slower, and Derek keeps muttering apologies. “I’m so sorry. I have to take care of you later, have to heal some before I can carry you. We need to get farther away. Hold on, baby, hang in there.” He stops to stroke over Stiles’ hair at one point, puts his hand on Stiles’ cheek and gives him a tiny smile. “You’re *amazing*,” he says, “You are so strong.” And the warmth of that gets Stiles through another twenty or so endless minutes.

But finally, his body just won’t work anymore, adrenaline only getting him this far. Derek swings him up into his arms as he collapses, holding him tight against his chest. Stiles flops deadened arms around Derek’s neck, holding on, trying to push whatever parts of himself he can against Derek’s warm skin, and his eyes close in exhaustion. He can tell from the bouncing that Derek has begun to run, but he just holds on tighter and gives everything over.

When Stiles opens his eyes again, it’s twilight, and Derek is settling him onto a cold mossy bank next to a stream. “Hi,” he says, and although his face is scowly, his eyes are smiling. They are clear and bright and echo the moss under Stiles. He smiles back, dopey, lifts his hand to pat Derek on his black-furred cheek, lips twitching anew at the bristly rub of stubble under his hand.

Derek bends over the stream and returns to Stiles with a double handful of water. Stiles holds Derek’s hands steady and drinks over his thumb. Mostly he just holds the frigid water in his mouth, which had become tortuously dry, allowing it to slip little by little down his abused throat. Derek waits patiently until Stiles pushes his hands away. Then, as Stiles collapses back on the moss, Derek puts his cold hands on either side of Stiles head and begins pulling pain. As a swell of warmth begins to curl in the wake of all that unmitigated agony, Stiles is able to relax a little. He hadn’t realized how very much he was hurting.

There’s still a significant amount of pain left when Derek apologizes, “I can’t take it all. I’m not strong enough yet.” Stiles pats his cheek again, accepting the apology and then curls back up, too cold and exhausted to even shiver.

Derek strips and crouches next to the water, quickly and efficiently splashing off the blood and lord knows what else that’s crusted all over his body. Stiles just watches with half-closed eyes, muzzily thinking about what a beautiful body the man has, the complete control over what he does and the raw power implicit in every movement. His muscles shift under his skin, bunching and stretching as he slops water over his body, and Stiles is happy to just be a voyeur. Most of the skin that’s revealed once he’s clean is unbroken, traced only with the pink and red lines of healing scars.

Stiles will admit that he’s jealous. Of both the healing and the physique.

When he’s done, Derek scoops up the black boxer-briefs he’d worn under his pants. “Do you mind if I wash you with this?” he asks, obviously feeling awkward about standing around offering to rub his underwear all over his cell-mate. “It’s. It’s softer than my jeans.” Stiles mimes sleepy laughter and gestures *Go ahead* with his hand.

Derek dunks the fabric in the stream and rinses it for a minute before approaching Stiles, slowly dragging the it across the mask of drying blood and tears and snot on his face. Stiles grabs onto his

wrist at the shock of cold water, and holds tighter still when Derek gently wipes around his broken nose. Stiles doesn't like to think what he must look like, or how awful this would feel without as much of a pain drain as Derek had already done.

Stiles kind of floats while Derek wipes the rest of him, gentle and patient and concerned. When he's done, he gives Stiles a little more water before scooping up his jeans and boots and soggy underpants. Then he scoops up Stiles as well, lifting him with no discernible effort. Stiles wants to protest that he can walk, except it would be a total lie. And also, hot man wants to carry him. So there's that. Also, hot in a more literal sense, since Stiles is shivering again and worried that the water trickling down his goosebump-covered skin might freeze before it drips free.

"There's a little cave back here," Derek says. "I could smell it earlier."

It's dark now, and Stiles can't see what Derek is talking about, but then he drops to his knees and shuffles forward some more, and Stiles can feel stone walls brush against his toes. It gets even darker.

Derek sets Stiles down on a floor that's a combination of smooth stone and dirt. It's cold, but really no worse than being in their cell. Except for the naked part.

Derek lies down next to Stiles before sweeping him up and laying him on Derek's chest. Startled, Stiles stares down into glowing red eyes. "Calm down," Derek soothes. "I just figure I'm warmer than the ground."

Stiles shrugs after a moment's thought. Sure, it's warmer to lie fully on top of a naked man than the cold, cold ground. He grins a little, thinking about how ridiculous the situation is, but what Derek says next wipes the incipient grin right off his face.

"I'll let you wear the jeans and stuff, after. But first I need to. I need to get that—" Derek curls his hands around Stiles' arms before migrating to his back, stroking briskly up and down its length. "The ... pen needs to come out. I have to get it out."

And that sends Stiles reeling back into the nightmare headspace that he'd been successfully suppressing for the past few hours. He shudders and bucks and shakes his head no, trying to talk, to plead, even though he *can't*, and gasping for air when he does nothing more than strain his throat.

"Stop. Stiles! *Stop*." The last is said in the *voice*, and Stiles immediately stills. "Shit. Sorry. I'm sorry, Stiles. I didn't mean to Dom you." Stiles just turns his head away, still resting on Derek's shoulder, and frowns, shivering. Both of them are quiet for a few minutes. Derek cups his shoulder blades with both hands, and they're warm against him, in spite of the welts and cuts that cover his back. Derek's fingers tick gently back and forth, comforting and stabilizing, and Stiles melts a little under them. His heart is strong under Stiles' chest, adamantly pounding a message of life, freedom, trust and safety. Stiles relaxes until he's instinctively breathing in sync with his Dom.

Eventually Derek says, soft but inexorable, "We can do this one of two ways, Stiles, whichever you choose. But it *has* to happen. Um. I can just be very fast, and it might hurt a little, but it'll feel better soon. Or. Or I can make it good for you, relax you and," Derek inhales sharply. "Make it good." He pauses, but Stiles doesn't move.

A hand moves up to stroke his cheek. "Should I just do it fast, Stiles?"

Stiles wraps his hands around enormous biceps and shakes his head, just a little. “Yeah? You want me to make it good?” Stiles nods jerkily. “Okay.” Derek’s voice drops down, becomes that low rumble growl that Stiles has quickly grown to love. “Alright. I’m just gonna relax you a little first. Just wanna touch you, baby.”

Stiles lies still, hyper-focused on the hot skin under him, the prickle of unfamiliar body hair against his chest, his thighs, his groin. He keeps his face turned away, because he doesn’t want to stick his broken nose into Derek’s neck, but he pays close attention. Derek sweeps both hands together down the length of his back, gentle over all the hurts that had been dealt to him, fingertips pressing just a little between each knob of his spine. “I want you to lay still for me, Stiles. Let me do the work. Can you stay still?” Stiles nods a little and Derek growls in approval. “*Good boy,*” he says, and both his hands slip over the swell of Stiles’ ass.

Stiles basks in the glow of the praise, sinking further into Derek’s body, and sighs when Derek’s hands begin to send out that warmth, and the drumming sting of the wounds on his ass and back begins to fade, replaced with buzzing and hypnotic bliss. “Good,” Derek murmurs through his chest. “Good boy. I can feel you going down.” He briefly cradles Stiles’ waist before rubbing little circles in the divot under the back of his skull. “You’re doing just what I said,” he hums. “I can feel your tension fading away.” Stiles blinks slowly, focusing on nothing more than the warmth and the buzz, on the feeling of floating.

It feels like safety.

An eternity later, after eons of soft touches and murmured praise, there are fingers resting against his lips, scarcely touching them. “Can you suck my fingers, Stiles? Make them nice and wet?”

Stiles opens his mouth before he’s even thought about it, flicks his tongue out as Derek slides his fingers in. He tastes like water; maybe a little salty, a little rough over Stiles’ tongue. Stiles sucks slowly, not trying to do anything other than make them wet, to notice how it feels. He doesn’t think about the last thing that’d been in his mouth, only about the texture of Derek’s skin, the scent of his body under Stiles’, the low rumble of his approval that Stiles is being so good for him.

Derek’s breathing gradually grows serrated, and Stiles can feel the bulge of his cock, then, swelling hot against his hip. The fingers are withdrawn slowly, rubbing on his bottom lip as they go, and Derek turns his head to nudge against Stiles’, stubble scraping through the bristles of his own hair. “Perfect.” Derek purrs. “That was perfect. Just what I wanted.” And Stiles feels himself float further out, rocking on subspace waves that echo the rhythm of their heartbeats.

Derek wraps an arm around his waist, then, holding him securely, and he crooks his ankles around Stiles’ calves, guiding one leg up and open, but still resting on top of Derek’s own. “So good,” Derek breathes, as his dampened hand comes to rest on the cleft of Stiles’ ass. “You’re perfect, Stiles, doing so well.”

Syrupy warmth radiates from the point where he touches Stiles’ ass. Stiles relaxes incrementally more, until he’s more or less poured over Derek’s body. Such removal of the pain leaves him so euphoric he can hardly be bothered to breathe.

Moving in this blissful lethargy seems like an impossible chore. Stiles feels like he’s a balloon, floating on a string that tethers him to the earth only through Derek’s fingers. *Don’t let go, Dom. Don’t let go; or I’ll float away and I’ll never find my way back...*

Derek rumbles at him, *You're safe with me little sub, let go, let it all go, I'll bring you back when you're ready....* And everything just feels so good. Stiles knows that's absurd, in a distant part of his brain, knows he's nearly entirely broken right now, but that's so easy to ignore. Let go of thought altogether and just feel... it's all he has to do. Feel good, that's what his Dom commanded. Relax and feel good.

Derek coaxes his leg up a little further; pliant as butter, Stiles allows it before squirming a little against him, instinctively tilting his hips up, brushing against Derek's probing fingers. And then they're there, working their way between the globes of his ass, sliding down until they're circling around his anus, and Stiles stiffens, rising from his subspace sea, afraid and confused.

"No, Stiles, be still. Shhh, shhh," Derek cranes his head forward to nip the crook of Stiles neck in warning. "I know you can stay still for this, just like I asked you to. Stiles. I know you can do what I'm asking you, because you're such a good boy, and you try so hard. Come on now, honey. You need to let me take charge. Give it up, little sub. Give in..."

And Stiles nods again, falling back under, subspace closing over him without a ripple. Thought-free, he floats on his tether.

Derek's fingers don't stop their little massage. He's in no hurry, just gently rubbing as Stiles relaxes further, every once in a while skating up to the base of his spine and then traveling all the way down to his taint, touch always firm and certain.

Derek spits on his other fingers and swaps them out, rubbing harder, now, pushing a little, demanding entrance. Stiles involuntarily rolls his hips as his blood heats up, clutching harder at Derek's shoulders. "That's right. Good," Derek says, and shifts Stiles a little so their cocks are side by side. "Rock into me, baby. Take what you want." And he encourages Stiles by guiding his hips with his free hand, while working his way steadily inside, not hesitating, not frightening, doing exactly what he said he'd do, just how he said it was going to be.

More spit is added, helping the glide, until Stiles realizes that while he was distracted by the heat of frottage he'd been fully penetrated. His mouth opens involuntarily, and he licks and sucks at Derek's shoulder, squirming on top of his body, beginning to shiver with sensation. He doesn't bite, because his Dom had told him no biting, and Stiles wants to be so good for him.

"Oh, god, Stiles, yes. Do you have any idea what you do to me? You feel so incredible and you sink down so fast. *Fuck-*" Derek's cock is rigid next to his, and Stiles ruts against it, feeling skin stick to skin, the prickling scrub of pubic hairs adding to the sensation. He thinks Derek has two fingers inside him now. Two, and they thrust and rotate, feeling gently around until they probe a spot that make Stiles shudder dizzily, stopping himself just short of sinking his teeth into Derek's shoulder.

"There you are," Derek sounds amused and turned on. "That's the spot. Feel good, baby?" Stiles simply fucks backwards to remind him not to stop, and Derek chuckles breathily beneath him.

Stiles is so hot with all the sensation that he barely notices when something is drawn from his ass, fingers leaving him momentarily and there's the click and rattle of something tossed aside. "Good, excellent. Just the cap left." Derek spits on his fingers again, and they slide right in, straight for the spot that lights Stiles up, rubbing until he's panting and undulating, holding on for dear life, dizzy and caught in the whirlwind Derek orchestrates.

Derek grabs something else inside him, and there's a tug and a scrape that huts sharply for a second before Derek draws away the pain. "All done, baby," Derek says. "All done. You were so good."

And now you get your reward. I'm going to make you feel so good." More heat spreads from his fingers: the sting vanishes as if it had never been, and all that remains is overwhelming pleasure.

Stiles digs in his fingernails and mewls silently as Derek begins to thrust against him, fingers plunging deep and withdrawing in counter-rhythm to his hips, dragging across that white-hot spot inside, using his entire body to light Stiles up, to send him over the edge, murmuring encouragement and compliments as he does, until Stiles is deaf with passion and freezes tight, clenching down, and the final drag of Derek's cock sends him over, shaking and panting and hot and unburdened, as he comes between them, and he feels Derek's release immediately following his own. He's floating, anesthetized, and doesn't have to think about anything more than how wonderful his body feels, the solidity of Derek holding him in place, the darkness that cocoons them both safe and sound.

Within moments, exhausted and drained, they both slip into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Domachenkov, my lovely beta. Sorry this is a little late, it's been a hectic day what with a sick kid and the end of the school term. I am literally posting this while I cook dinner. I don't have time to add tags. If you think any should be added for this chapter, please let me know.

Please allow me to hand-wave the matter of electricity. (I'm so ashamed, I'm descended from two generations of electrical engineers, and yet, I really just made all this shit up. I'm sure it isn't obeying the laws of science.) And speaking of practical matters: please don't go on hikes in the woods with a Sharpie in your ass. If you want details on the potential damage it could do, check out sumingu's comment on the last chapter. *Hand-waves* (Mostly because I'm too lazy to do research.)

Speaking of comments, thank you all so much for following this story, and for caring enough to comment. It means so much to me, to know that the story speaks to you, and to get your opinions on what is happening. Do Not Go Gentle has 1200 kudos right now, and I am utterly beside myself in shock. Thank you.

Stiles' Shift

Chapter Notes

Here you are, my darlings! Enjoy.

Derek is reluctantly pulled from a profoundly exhausted sleep some time later. His body is still trying to heal, and having had nothing more to eat than a couple handfuls of cereal in the better part of a week, he has very little fuel to fix it with. It takes him a minute to drag his eyes open and sort his surroundings into something that makes sense.

Stiles is stretched out on top of him: not heavy enough for his size, but a reassuring weight nonetheless. All is not well, however. His body, which feels frail under Derek's hands, but for the unexpected breadth of his shoulders, is ferociously hot, and not just in contrast to the cold air and even colder ground under Derek's back. The boy is shivering with fever, and Derek rears up with a whimper when he fights through the fog in his mind and remembers the bite.

Stiles sags to the side, but Derek catches and rearranges him, so he is situated across Derek's knees. The bite. *The bite*. Derek was so concerned with escape and Stiles' broken body and extracting the thrice-damned pen he'd *forgotten about the bite*. How could he, even?

Shakily, holding his breath, he runs his hand down to Stiles' forearm and lifts it to his nose. He can see fine, if in grayscale: there is more light in the cave, even in the middle of the night, than there had been in their cell. The skin is still torn and ragged, even now seeping fresh blood into a crusted mess of scab, and Derek grits his teeth together hard, face knit into concern and anger and fear.

Stiles is utterly limp under his hands, has no more resistance than a cooked noodle. He drapes across Derek's lap like fine fabric, or poured pudding. His heartbeat is irregular, strained, and Derek's hand, clasped around his elbow, slips a little in the clinging layer of chilled sweat that covers him. Derek quickly lifts Stiles' head, which is flopped backwards, to relieve the pressure the punishing collar is putting on his windpipe. He resettles Stiles so that he's propped on Derek's shoulder, head fallen forward a bit to rest in the crook of Derek's neck. The barely-there puffs of his breath against Derek's chest are terrifying, and Derek has some bizarre sympathetic response where he can scarcely breathe himself, but that may just be the fear.

Having made Stiles as comfortable as possible, he lifts Stiles' arm again, nosing around the wound. He licks at it, to clean it and encourage healing. His saliva contains a few coagulating and antibacterial agents, and that can only help. Stiles' blood is rich, strongly infused with his obstinate spirit and individual scent twined with iron and life. Derek doesn't taste infection, or the terrifying and unwholesome black excreta that means the bite won't take, but that doesn't make him feel any better.

Stiles certainly doesn't smell of werewolf.

"Stiles? Stiles, wake up." But he doesn't move, his eyelids don't even twitch. He just shakes and pants, head and limbs occasionally twitching. He's deeply unconscious.

Derek holds him and strokes him, panicked and miserable and so, so angry at himself for biting the boy, even if it had been forced on him. He doesn't think being tortured and tired and unprepared is enough of an excuse and he knows he would never forgive himself if Stiles dies. So many lives already, snuffed, because of his negligence. He can't take another, simply cannot. He'd fall apart at the seams. It's so wrong, so incredibly unfair that they should escape, that Stiles should survive the agonizing beatings, only to be killed by Derek's actions, no matter how unintentional.

Stiles stiffens, suddenly, scratches feebly at Derek's chest, tries to turn his face into Derek's body and then jerks away with a gasp when he bumps his broken nose. So Derek presses the sub's cheek and temple close to his heart, pinning him gently, wiping the sweat from his face, desperately scenting him as if making him Pack will prevent him from dying.

He supports Stiles' head as he drags his cheek carefully along the boy's jaw, his cheek, his hair. The bristling rub of his growing beard is loud in the cave, a susurrating baseline to the stalling beat of Stiles' heart. Derek closes his eyes and breathes deeply, mouth opened to catch every molecule he can. Under sickness and stress, buried, but not irretrievably subsumed, is the scent of Stiles.

His native odor is fresh, sharp and hot. Peppery and tart. Stiles makes Derek think of ginger, of pies and tea and comfort with a hidden bite. As he drags the scent glands at the corner of his mouth along Stiles' skin, his own smell mingles with it. Derek has always been reminiscent of outdoors, of humus and loam, the sting of fresh, cold air. Combined, their scent is breathtaking, grows into an entity comprised of more than the sum of its parts. Something fresh and warm, grounded in the earth and stretching towards the sky. Something that broadcasts *mate* and *mine*; *ours* and *us*. Something that promises a future.

Derek clutches Stiles more desperately, rubbing fingertips on other scent-rich areas of Stiles' body, cataloguing febrile skin and clammy sweat with gut-wrenching distress. He wants to lift their blended essence until it overwhelms all the negative that is happening, pervades the little cave and all of Derek's fears.

But, of course, that is a futile dream.

Time passes like syrup. Maybe an hour, maybe more. The black goo never comes, but neither does the sense of *wolf*. Stiles sweats, and shakes, and wheezes while Derek holds him tightly, leaving unwitting bruises, as though preparing to win a tug-of-war with Death.

Eventually, Derek scoots them to the wall of the cave, leaning back and resigning himself to the long vigil ahead. And although all his belief in justice in the world has long since faded, he still prays, promising the fates they can take it out on him, if only they care for Stiles.

At one point in the endless night, Stiles seizes, rigid and convulsing. Derek is terrified, helpless, doesn't know what to do but keep a hand under his head so he doesn't smash it into a rock, dodge the stiffly flailing limbs. He howls in anguish as Stiles' heart stops and stutters and his breath whistles weakly into his lungs, abortive and straining.

"Please. Please. Please." Derek mutters his desperate refrain unaware of what he's doing, wiping blood away from Stiles' mouth where he's bitten his tongue, pulling at the torrent of his pain until Derek can't handle it anymore, sagging slowly sideways with his precious burden, resting, only for a minute, on the cold floor.

"*Please.*"

He doesn't think it's been very long before he drags open wearied lids, but he's aware of something different immediately. The heart he'd been listening to for days now is beating frantically, ten times faster than it had before, and he jerks with a gasp, but doesn't move, because there is something warm snuggled up into his armpit, curled into the space between arm and rib, something small and soft that smells distinctly of *Stiles*, all ginger and bergamot, but also of *animal*, wild and tangy. It huddles, buried in Derek as much as it can be, flinching violently. The pain Derek had knocked himself out trying to drain has returned: the creature smells hurt and afraid and exhausted, a rattling roil of misfortune.

"*Stiles*," Derek murmurs, lifting a hand to touch. It's dawn outside, and when he raises his head he can see clearly. *Stiles* is no larger than a housecat, curled tightly inside the crook of Derek's elbow. He has little black nose on the end of a narrow, triangular face and two extremely enormous ears that twitch with every noise, from the shift of Derek's hair as he turns his head to the rustle of pine needles outside and the cheeps of early morning birds. His fur is thick and pale, glowing faintly in the drift of dawn light. His eyes are tightly closed.

The collar is propped under his nose on one side and flops over his body, close to his tail on the other. His neck is rubbed raw, a mess of balding scabbed spots, oozing into his fur. Derek diverts his first touch to lift the collar instead, slinging it out through the entrance of the cave, savagely glad to see it gone.

Stiles jolts at the movement, lurching to his feet and falling over immediately. His eyes are black and as angular as his face; so wide with distress that Derek can see the whites at the corners. He immediately wraps his hands around fragile ribs, trapping the creature *Stiles* has become before he runs away or hurts himself. *Stiles* shows sharp little teeth in a feral growl and bites down hard just above Derek's wrist.

"*Stiles*," Derek says calmly, ignoring the sudden sharp pain, the percolating scent of his own blood that fills the cave. "Let go right now. I said no biting."

The giant ears are shifting rapidly, towards Derek and then to the mouth of the cave, where echoes have briefly returned. Derek isn't even sure what *Stiles* is hearing: those ears have to be powerfully sensitive, much more so than his own. Derek squeezes a little with his hands and uses Alpha command. "*No biting, Stiles*." He doesn't know if *Stiles* can understand him right now. He's completely at sea, has no idea what kind of creature it is that *Stiles* has turned into.

He's no wolf, that's for certain. He's not anything Derek's ever seen before, and for a moment he wishes fiercely for his mother, for the resources of his slaughtered family, because he's never heard of this happening. As far as Derek had known, the Bite either turns you into a werewolf or kills you. He'd never thought there were other options.

Slowly, slowly, *Stiles* loosens his jaws, turning his head to drop Derek's wrist. He is hardly big enough to have fit his mouth around it in the first place. He still shudders, and his tail is clamped hard between his legs and he reeks of fear in a stinging chlorinated burn. Derek sits up and scoops the little animal against his chest, cradling him there and stroking softly on his back. "Hey," he says. "I'm not going to hurt you, *Stiles*. You know me, I know you do. I take care of you, right? I don't hurt you. I'm *safe*. You're safe with me."

He tries to draw out Stiles' pain, but simply lacks the wherewithal, too drained himself. His own hands are shaking. He rubs his fingers gently on top of Stiles' tiny skull, petting behind his ears. He avoids the mangled neck.

Stiles makes no sound, but slowly stops quivering, stops jerking whenever Derek's fingers stir in his soft fur. His ears remain cocked forward and alert, but no longer swivel desperately in all directions at once. The rigidity of his little body relaxes, and Derek keeps stroking, around his ears, across his spine and flanks, scratching lightly above his tail.

Stiles hasn't healed, and Derek is worried. Every bit of this is so wildly unfamiliar, but surely if Stiles had become were he'd be healing faster than this? Or, what if he hadn't turned were at all? What if he'd simply been transformed into this little animal and could never shift back? Was his *brain* animal? Was Stiles in there at all?

Hours later the sun is up fully, and Derek watches pink-tinged light turn more golden and then clear, filtering in through dust motes at the mouth of the cave until it is too high to reach inside any longer. His fingers never stop moving through Stiles' fur, noting injuries through spikes of heat and pain, mapping out this tiny new body. Stiles breathes more easily, without the cruel constriction of the collar, but he still makes no sound, and although the worrying whistle is gone, each inhale still sounds rough and awkward.

"We need to eat," he murmurs absently, thinking that some calories could only help them both to heal, even if Stiles only heals at a normal animal rate. At least Derek might have the energy to mitigate the pall of pain that hangs over them both.

Stiles doesn't respond, although Derek wasn't expecting him to. But his body is distinctly more relaxed, and Derek feels that it might be safe to leave him for a short while. He frees one hand and reaches slowly over to his jeans, works them into a little nest while Stiles watches suspiciously around his bicep. "I have to go hunt, Stiles," he says quietly. "We both need food. I'm going to leave you here, alright?" He sweeps around for his socks and tucks them into one corner of the jeans, knowing the stronger scent of them will be comforting to Pack.

If Stiles *is* Pack.

Is Derek even Stiles' Alpha? Does that work with... other creatures? He can feel their bond humming inside. It's changed a little, shifted, settled, grown a little stronger and deeper. However, Derek's bond with Stiles has been different from the others since its inception, and he doesn't know what this one means. Pack? Mate? Dom/sub? Some combination of all of them, perhaps. Or maybe it's just a bond created in a time of extreme stress, and will fade now that they're free.

He engages their bond, layering it with affection and acceptance. Stiles' slanted black eyes stare up at him, blink slowly, but he doesn't know if that's a response to his efforts at bond communication.

He lowers Stiles carefully into this newly crafted denim nest, leaves his hands around him as he settles. "*Stay here,*" he commands, Alpha heavy. Stiles just huffs a little, blinks again, and then delicately, careful of what is clearly still an injury, works his nose under one of Derek's socks. There's lighter fur above his eyes that is patterned almost like eyebrows, and somehow Stiles looks like he's saying *Get on with it, then, what are you waiting for?*

Derek shakes his head and almost smiles, before tilting his head from side to side, snapping out the cricks of the night. He rolls to hands and knees and transitions easily to his wolf, bone and muscle shifting and rearranging under his skin, the pain of it so natural that it registers as no more than a

deep stretch. He yips a little, immensely relieved to be free, to be wearing his furred skin, and his tail wags when he looks at Stiles. The manacles that had been tight around his wrists since he tore free of the fence are now just loose enough that he can work himself out of them, thrusting them to the side with powerful and disdainful flicks of his paws.

Stiles looks even smaller when Derek is a wolf. He is nearly 200 pounds in this form, and he thinks Stiles couldn't be more than 5 soaking wet and most of that would be the weight of the water. Derek approaches slowly, pushing down on the instinct to lower his hind quarters and initiate play. The wolf is happy to see Stiles, filled with a simple joy and certainty, and his tail keeps spontaneously wagging as he gets closer. The wolf is completely at ease with Stiles' odd form, unburdened with any whys and wherefores.

Stiles hadn't moved at all during Derek's transformation, but his eyes are very bright above the black edge of Derek's sock, and his ears track Derek closely. Careful of his injury, Derek nudges his own nose under the sock, brushing against the long, stiff whiskers on Stiles' muzzle, huffing warmly into his fur, sharing breath with his tiny mate. Stiles blinks again when Derek laps curiously at the corner of his mouth, tongue swiping across a row of petite pre-molars and the delicate stretch of skin at the corner of his grin before grooming across the short hairs of his cheek.

Stiles withdraws his nose from the sock long enough to touch it daintily to Derek's own, and then buries himself again. Derek rumbles at him and takes a last swipe at Stiles' ears, curiously attracted to their delicacy and bizarrely disproportionate size. And then he lopes off to hunt.

Derek hopes for a deer, but he'll be satisfied with anything red-blooded and warm. He winds up, after several hours of hunting, with an enormous raccoon: fat and juicy and too stupid to run away when it first saw the giant black wolf. Derek is on it in a moment, jaws sinking through fur and flesh and muscle; he shakes once, twice, and the creature is dead. He trots proudly back to the cave, prize hanging heavily from his jaws.

Stiles watches him with big, shining eyes when he returns, gaze unwavering. He stands up when Derek drops the kill in front of him, pawing Derek's sock off his nose, and takes a couple wobbly steps closer. He doesn't make it far, tripping over a fold of the jeans and falling abruptly to his side, panting. Before he can attempt to stand again Derek pins him down with one heavy paw and barks an admonishment.

Stay down. Don't move.

Then Stiles smells scared again, so Derek licks him in apology, mouthing the entirety of one intriguing ear, dragging his tongue across the whole of Stiles' face, licking across his smooth, damp nose and through the contrasting black whiskers that look more feline than canid. He taps his paw once more on the weak little body, a warning to stay, not because he is Alpha and eats first, but because Stiles is sick and wounded. Derek turns and quickly tears into the raccoon, working free choice bites of viscera, chewing them quickly into smaller pieces, and dropping them carefully next to Stiles' nose one at a time.

Stiles eats ravenously, nearly inhaling each mouthful, and Derek is glad for the pregestation he'd done, or Stiles might choke on it. The little animal still struggles to swallow, with a prolonged burst of intense discomfort each time, but he ignores it and so does Derek, who cannot help with pain in this form. He starts chewing each offering a little more, though, before dropping it in front of Stiles.

Stiles slows down after a while, finally coming to a stop and staring mournfully at the last bite like he *wishes* he could, but he'll simply pop if he tries. So Derek begins feeding himself, eating until his jaws ache, devouring the 30 pound animal in less than twenty minutes, leaving nothing but some bones and hide. He sits up with a wheezing yawn, stretches backwards, back tilted low, front paws extended, and then licks his chops with loud satisfaction. He already feels stronger and healthier; and he can sense his body healing the deep tissue damage that remained from the day before.

He strolls over to Stiles, who is lying where he fell, eyes drowsily slitted, and licks gently, alert for pain as he cleans the sanguineous residue of their meal off Stiles' broken nose, lapping at his muzzle until the blood is cleared away, before moving on to tiny forepaws, which have long silky hair even on the bottoms, peeking out from black pads. Stiles lets him do it, although he lifts his lip in a faint snarl and bats at Derek's face whenever he encounters a wound; and Stiles has many, still. Derek gentles his efforts further, chews a little in the deep fur behind the joint of his front leg just for the sensation of it, and then noses Stiles upright. He'd grab the pup by the scruff to carry him if his neck weren't so torn up. Instead he nudges the wobbly creature back to the nest of Derek's pants and watches closely as he curls into it, tucking his nose once more into Derek's sock, ears twisted to point at Derek as he does.

Derek huffs, pleased, and flops down in a satisfied sprawl, stretching his front legs on either side of the little nest and resting his head on the denim next to Stiles' body. He works diligently over Stiles' neck for a while, soothing the injuries with his tongue, washing away all the taste of leather and fear until Stiles smells of nothing more than clean injury, himself and Derek.

The day closes on them in such a fashion. Sleeping and healing, curled around one another for warmth and comfort as they do.

In the morning, Derek howls for his pack, sitting on his haunches in the tiny clearing in front of the cave.



The World From Some 8" Off The Ground

Chapter Notes

Aaaand, I'm back with a loong chapter featuring adorable!fluffy!teeny!Stiles. Because I know we just can't get enough. Derek's pack will finally make their appearance. (Look at me, getting set to move the plot along.) I'm going to call this the End of Part 1. The remainder of the story will be Stiles and Derek out in the real world, populated with people! That's right, I'm about to start juggling more than two characters. What are we now, some 40k words in? I've got 75k total so far, and I'm trying to wrap it up (a-hahahaha, we'll see how that goes), so we're just about at the halfway point. Which means pace yourself, my darlings.

Thanks to [Domachenkov](#), as always, for her sharp eyes and gentle guidance. And thanks to all of you, who have been inspiringly indefatigable in following such a slowly updating story: I'm grateful for all of your comments, your honest and enthusiastic interest, all the kudos, bookmarks and subscriptions. You breathe life into this story, you really do. It wouldn't be happening without you.

The first thing Stiles is aware of the next morning is sound. His ears pivot this way and that without his volition. There's the flux of his own breath, the working of his lungs and his heart. When he twitches his nose, he can hear the subtle brush of his whiskers on the fabric of his nest. His heart patters a rapid beat, many times faster than the heartbeat next to him that he knows instinctively is Derek. (Derek's breathing is slow, huffing warmly across the grain of fur on his back and neck, curling around to tickle the sensitive bristles inside his ears.)

Wind soughs through naked twigs and dried leaves. He can hear the creek burbling, and random isolated drips falling from the forest canopy as the morning dew condenses. Life is stirring outside, and he can hear it all. Birds chirp and rustle as they kick the detritus looking for breakfast. Winter insects hum and buzz and scratch. A bird swoops nearby in a near-silent ruffle of feathers.

The inundation of sound is overwhelming, and Stiles opens his mouth to pant, edgy and unsettled.

Opening his mouth makes the scents in the air potent, more nuanced and revealing than they'd ever been to his human nose. He smells dirt and denim and stale blood, the frost in the air, the sodden humus under the trees, the remains of dinner last night. (Oh, gross, he ate raw animal, he knows he did, and on some level knows how completely unappealing that is.)

The day before is a blur, fuzzy and frightening, and Stiles doesn't want to probe it too closely. So for a while he just listens, smells, breathes and lets his brain float.

Of course, he's Stiles, and that kind of meditation could never last for long, even with the Adderall, which he's been without for too long now. As if the recognition that he's without his meds is some kind of trigger, Stiles is suddenly flooded with memories: being in the dark cell with Derek, taken out and beaten so they could send a video clip to his dad (and even worse than the pain of the kicking and hitting was knowing how hurt his father would be to see it.) Witnessing Derek,

tortured and bleeding, strung up like a pelt on the fence. Gunner throwing Stiles down across the table and. Rudy. Doing. The thing. That he did.

The Bite.

The escape.

Gunner, and all the blood. The way his head had flopped, unsupported by tendon and muscle, before he'd dropped. Rudy, impaled clear through on Derek's vengeful arm.

Stiles starts shivering and can't stop. He remembers Derek so easily coaxing him into subspace, hands warm and sure on his body, making the invasion feel good, taking out the. Thing.

He feels the distant creep of shame, intruding on the dulling emotional filters of his animal nature. Shame that he'd let himself be violated. Penetrated. Let it happen with Gunner, with Rudy, and then again, without complaint, with Derek. Let his body be guided into orgasm by someone he hardly knew. It wasn't something he'd ever let happen before. He feels himself scrunch up his new, pointy face, fails utterly to emit a wounded little whine through his damaged larynx. His ears lie flat to either side as he strives for apathy in lieu of self-disgust and fear.

He is curled up against a massive wolf paw, nearly the size of his face. It doesn't twitch, but he knows Derek is awake now, the rhythm of his heart changing, his scent spiking with something warm and earthy that Stiles instinctively decodes as concern. He whuffles at Stiles' ear, his nose cold as it cards through Stiles fur.

Lost in these sickening memories, Stiles doesn't want to be touched... can't *stand* the idea of being touched... and lurches up, tripping over his feet as he tries to coordinate walking on too many legs. (Like a dream, he distantly remembers being four-legged, yesterday. Remembers that he'd been an animal then, but the knowledge of it had been so deeply buried in fear and pain and hunger and exhaustion that it really hadn't much mattered at the time.)

It matters now.

He scrambles away, towards the mouth of the cave, thinking only to get away, and he keeps falling, tangled in his ridiculously fluffy tail. He can hear... *things*... moving under the ground, and his heart rate skyrockets. Derek pulls himself to his own four feet, and Stiles cowers briefly, instinct instructs him to drop down and roll over to show his belly. But fear and vigilance have him twist to his side and pop back up immediately thereafter, giving Derek no chance to approach him.

Derek grumbles at him and then barks: *Stay still. Don't move. Submit.* So Stiles does an instant replay, flopping to his side and exposing his stomach. But as Derek advances, he loses faith again, curling around and leaping backwards in one strong jump that lands him confusingly far away. Derek growls, and they repeat this uneasy pattern a few more times, until Stiles has been backed against a wall and Derek flashes out one giant paw to pin him to the ground belly up, tail clamped between his legs.

Stiles convulses, panting, trying to get away. Derek is enormous: his head is the size of Stiles' whole body, and with his eyes glowing red in the dim light of the cave and sharp white teeth headed right for him, suddenly all Stiles feels is terror and he wiggles and strains, trying to get free, ignoring the pain his body is screaming at him, fighting through the weakness he still feels.

Derek holds him with no effort, but suddenly he's licking Stiles face, soft and comforting, rumbling low in his chest. Stiles squirms against the tickle of that wide tongue, sweeping from his nose to his ears in a single stroke. Finally, worn out, he calms down under Derek's ablutions, the soft, comforting growls and steady flow of scent (*home, belonging, protection, acceptance*) allowing him to be lulled.

After a while, Stiles begins to wonder what the fuck he *is*. He's no wolf. His paws are light, almost white except for black-furred tips, and dainty. He doesn't think he's turned into a cub, and that's the only reason he'd be so much smaller than Derek if he'd become a wolf. And yet, he's something. Certainly. Not human. He cranes his head to see his tail. It is full, as fluffy as the girth of his body, and creamy white until it darkens right at the tip. When he crosses his eyes he can see a slender white muzzle with long black whiskers and a black nose. He catches a glimpse of swiveling ears from the corners of his eyes.

Derek shifts to human with no warning, but keeps one hand on Stiles as he does, so he can't startle and run away. Stiles watches the transformation wide-eyed, seeing the painful looking shudder of muscle and bone under his skin, and hearing it as well: the groan and grind as Derek's insides reposition into his human shape. Even through it all, the hand pinning him gently down doesn't move, or even change in pressure. In a distant part of his mind, Stiles is impressed by the level of control that implies.

Derek kneels next to him, unabashed in his nudity and apparently undisturbed by the cold (although Stiles cannot stop himself from sneaking a peek at his... er... *third leg*... to see if it's reacting to the cold any more than the rest of his body. Okay, so he's curious. And it's probably inappropriate timing, but screw it.) Derek appears to be as unbothered here as he is elsewhere: or, if that's shriveled, than he's naturally... *prodigious*. But looking at his dick, hanging soft as it is, nestled in its bed of hair and cushioned by a heavy scrotum, Stiles is suddenly, viscerally reminded of another, ramming between his lips, stretching his mouth and choking him; he jerks in Derek's hold, shutting his eyes tightly and putting a paw across his nose.

That move hurts a lot, and Derek lifts his paw gently away. "I think your nose might still be broken, Stiles. Or at least, it's not fully healed. So be careful with it." Stiles recovers enough to flick a disdainful ear at him (*Thank you, Captain Obvious!*), indicating his disgust with both the gratuitous examination and Stiles' opinion on his own werewolfy healing powers and prowess. Well, maybe the latter part of that wasn't communicated quite as clearly as Stiles would like it to have been.

Derek begins to carefully move him this way and that, combing through his fur, looking for fleas or injuries, Stiles doesn't want to assume (because he knows what that does to *you* and *me*, ha). But he breathes out hard in a silent cry when Derek palpates his neck and then his nose, and he squirms to get away. Derek perseveres, however, hands controlling and determined. Pretty much everywhere hurts, and Stiles can smell the scent of his own pain rising around him. "It's okay, Stiles. Just give me a minute, and I'll be done," Derek mutters. When he's poked or prodded just about every hurt place on Stiles, he goes over it all again, but this time with his magical wolfy mojo, leaving Stiles boneless with relief and pleasure when he's done.

Deep in Stiles' chest, he's vibrating, the gentle sound growing in volume as he relaxes.

"You're purring," Derek says, softly, as if he thinks it might make Stiles stop. Stiles can't stop, because he doesn't even know how he started. It just is, thrumming away inside his body, the only noise he's made in days and days, but not coming from anywhere near his larynx.

Oh my god, he thinks. I'm a goddamn cat. How did a werewolf bite make me a fucking housecat? The hunters had said that the bite of a werewolf in ‘beta shift’ would make him a wolf, give him all the good werewolf things, like strength and power and the ability to heal. He’d been utterly duped. He is a puny kitty, and nothing has healed, and it isn’t fair. He is too tranquilized from the flood of wolf-induced endorphins to get very worked up about it, but tries to glare through his drooping eyes at Derek anyway. *I’m judging you. You can’t do the Bite right, you idiot.*

Derek strokes him gently, toying with his ears, which Stiles keeps twitching away, but Derek persists in returning to. Stiles is too drowsy and high to fight over it, though. He stares at his little feet and thinks, *Oh, wait, I can’t be a cat. Those are toenails, and they’re not retractable.*

But then he dozes off, warm in the security of Derek’s hands, which envelope both sides of his body. His last thought is, *How could I get so small? Where did my mass go?*

He wakes up a little while later, and Derek is a wolf again, curling his absurdly gigantic body around Stiles, his head lifted alertly, warding Stiles from danger. He licks at the corner of Stiles’ mouth, and Stiles grumps at him, standing to turn around a few times before dropping back down and carefully tucking his snout into the depths of Derek’s fur, secure in the wild, familiar scent of him, the placid thudding of his heart.

The next time Stiles opens drowsy eyes, it’s because Derek has just lifted his head, body resonating with a different kind of alertness. He no longer merely guards: something is here, is on the way. Stiles is suddenly frantic and terrified, like flipping a switch. When he concentrates, he can hear feet rushing through the woods. Not close, yet, but getting closer with every step. He prepares to run, to hide, heart tripping, but Derek closes his jaws gently around his neck, (well, his neck and shoulders and even part of his ribs; god, he’s so fucking tiny) and growls a soft warning to *Stay*. Then he makes a wheezing little whining sound, which translates to Stiles’ animal brain as *safety, family, excitement and pleasure*.

It eases Stiles sufficiently while Derek shifts to human once again, and before Stiles is quite sure what’s happening, he’s scooped up and they head outside. Derek howls when they reach the clearing, and there are three howls that answer him, excited and relieved. More wolves, maybe? Stiles pushes backwards on Derek’s forearm, scratching at his skin as he scrabbles to get away, or down, or run, he doesn’t even know. Derek grabs all four legs in one hand and presses Stiles close to his chest, limiting his movement. “It’s my pack, Stiles. Nothing to fear.”

Stiles isn’t so sure of that, but he’s trapped, and something about the tight way Derek is holding him, almost swamping him in hand and arm and wall of muscular chest, is very comforting to the sub in Stiles and he settles in spite of himself.

There’s another yipping little howl nearby, and Derek answers. In minutes, it seems, three wolves burst from the underbrush, heading full tilt at Derek, who, much to Stiles’ consternation, drops to his knees, so that they can mill about him, rubbing against his sides and stretching their heads over his shoulders in armless hugs.

Derek stays still in all that jostling, clamping Stiles protectively against him with one hand so the strange wolves don’t encroach on him. He plants himself solidly and rubs the strange wolves as

they jostle for his attention, pushing against their muzzles with his cheek. He doesn't smile, but his eyes are soft, and the air grows pungent with *safety* and *relief* and *pack* and, increasingly, *curiosity*.

One of the newcomers, a light-colored wolf with tawny eyes and a plumpy coat, nudges rudely down at Stiles, trying to stick her nose in his neck, and he rears back and shows his teeth, snapping out at her. She retreats, offended, and Derek smoothly rises, lifting Stiles out of their reach. "No," he says simply, and it works, the three sitting down and staring up at him, waiting patiently.

"Shift," he orders, and they do. They are much more awkward with it than Derek, scents redolent of fierce focus and discomfort. They writhe with the change, grunting as their bodies contort in transformation. It takes them twice as long, but ultimately, three young people stand arrayed in front of Derek.

"Alpha," says one; he's large and built like a tank, dark-skinned and handsome. (Stiles doesn't look down, doesn't want to check out any more naked people, thanks so much; he will be keeping his gaze above the waistline.) "What happened? We've been looking for you for a week. Erica found the blood, and smelled hunters, so we knew you'd been attacked..."

"Isaac thought you might be dead," Erica chirps. She tosses back her long hair and acts insouciant, but her eyes have dark shadows underneath them, and Stiles can scent her worry and relief, the anxiety and exertion of prolonged uncertainty. She looks vaguely familiar to Stiles, and he wonders if she goes to his school. *Oh my god*, he thinks wildly, *there are werewolves at my school and I never knew?*

"There was so much blood—" the one who must be Isaac begins to protest, "And all we could smell was wolfsbane and hunters." He is taller than Derek, but has an air of fragility about him, hunches a little, so that he seems to take up less space than he actually does. His bones are delicately cut, and his hair is a bouncy halo of curls. Stiles thinks that if he weren't stark naked (and if it weren't so rare as to be nearly unheard-of) he might have the collar of a submissive. Derek softens at his words and releases Stiles with one hand long enough to brush at the side of Isaac's neck as his head tilts in automatic deference.

"You would all feel it if I died," Derek says. "I know you don't feel pack bonds like I do, not yet, but it is... *unmistakable*... when your Alpha dies."

Tank gets a faraway look, as if he's trying to access this 'pack bond', but Erica is brash rather than thoughtful, and steps closer to point right at Stiles' face. "What is that?" she demands at the same time Isaac asks, "So where were you?"

Derek envelopes Stiles in his hands again, and Stiles cannot stop the snarl from lifting his lip, threatening to bite the woman if she gets too close. She keeps staring at him, fascinated in an extremely unnerving, predatory kind of way. Derek ignores her and answers Isaac. "We were held captive in an old cabin not too far from here. It was definitely hunters, you're right. Four of them, that I saw."

"We?" asks Tank.

Derek dips his head at Stiles, who stares back at them around the side of Derek's hand, eyes large and bright.

"What *is* it?" Erica asks. "They had a pet? And you took it?"

Stiles would roll his eyes if he could.

Isaac stares at him, looking vaguely confused. "It smells strange," he comments diffidently.

"He doesn't matter right now," Derek says, and tugs gently on Stiles' ear. "We need to get back, figure out exactly what's going on. Get these assholes off our territory."

"Hell, yeah!" Erica cheers. Tank keeps looking thoughtfully at Stiles, but Isaac simply nods.

"We left the car about 10 miles down the mountain," Tank offers. "We were just following your howl, and it left the main road."

Derek bites his lower lip. "It's well-concealed, of course," he says, with an edge of threat in his voice.

Tank smothers a grin, unperturbed. "No one will see it," he confirms. "It's at the end of a crap logging road, and we parked well into the brush, covered it up."

Derek lets out a slow breath. "We'll stay here til morning." The sun has nearly set, and the air is graying with incipient twilight. "Stiles can heal a little more before the trip." His fingers absently touch on Stiles' ragged neck and Stiles jolts a little at the pressure. "Later," he says brusquely, forestalling Erica's eagerly opened mouth. "Go check the perimeter, make sure no one's followed you or us. Hunt. We need meat."

His pack nods as one and twist back into their animal forms. Tank is large, as dark as Derek's wolf, but with white at the throat. Isaac's form is nearly as lean as Erica's, long-legged and youthful, like he hasn't fully grown into his paws. His fur is smoky gray, woven with touches of white and black. Tank howls, and Erica and Isaac pause to howl with him, and then the three streak off into the woods, leaving Stiles and Derek alone.

Derek stands still for some ten minuets, head lifted nose-up, as if he's smelling what's going on with his pack. Eventually his vigilance ebbs, and he looks down at Stiles, who stares brightly back up at him. Derek's face is pulls into a scowl, and his eyebrows draw sharply down. He looks like he has murder on his mind, so his concerned murmur of "You're just as quiet in this form, aren't you?" is unexpected.

Stiles mouths a little at the meaty part of Derek's thumb, and huffs, which doesn't communicate anything as far as an answer, but seems adequate to Stiles.

Derek fingers his neck again. "You're not healing as fast as you should. I mean. If you were a wolf." He cups Stiles' muzzle and lifts it gently, until they're staring eye to eye. "But you're not a wolf. I have no idea what you are."

Stiles can hear the others in the woods, their passage marked not only by the shifting of leaves and rustling of underbrush, but also by the frantic stirring of forest life around them, in a sudden scramble to make themselves scarce.

Derek sets Stiles on the ground after a while, but keeps his hands around him as he admonishes, "Stay close, Stiles. You're in no condition to defend yourself." His voice has the unmistakable ring of command, although he isn't actively Domming; but Stiles feels inclined to obey this time, since it's getting dark and he's not in the mood to explore anyway. Derek rustles as he shifts back into

wolf, and he stalks around the clearing, leaning on trees and rocks as he does, unselfconsciously marking his territory.

Stiles walks, a little unsteadily, over to the stream and laps at the frigid water. It is clear and mercilessly cold, hurting his tongue and sinuses, so he doesn't drink much. With a wary eye on Derek, he sidles behind some scrub and lifts his leg to pee, wobbling with the instinct. After that, with Derek resolutely giving him the appearance of privacy, he defecates, instinctually kicking dirt and leaves over his leavings.

Stiles stops in shock when he's done. He's behaving like a cat. Like a cat. He's the size of a cat. He purrs like a cat. He covers his shit (which is awesome, because, like, that's clean and responsible, and so much better than leaving feces all over the lawn, but still!) like a cat. He's not even a panther or a jaguar or a lion, something large and fierce and able to protect itself; and Stiles rages a little at being a fucking sub, at being small and scared and *helpless*.

A cat.

With toenails.

Derek must sense the swift change in his emotions, because he steps closer and (embarrassingly) sniffs at where Stiles peed and the little pile of leaves over his scat before nudging inquisitively at his side. Stiles narrows his eyes at him, deciding that if anyone is to blame it must be Derek and his deficient bite. What a failwolf.

He spends some time following a cricket around, suppressing the confusing urge to chase and eat it, and leaps back in surprise when it stridulates its wings together to make noise: the sound seems deafening. Also, his jump took him over three feet back, which will take some getting adjusted to. Stiles tries jumping a few more times, and it's fun; he bounces like a rabbit, soaring off the ground with very little effort, as if his legs were springs. It does, however, aggravate his hurts, which is frustrating. Derek's pain mojo has pretty much faded, and not eating for as long as he has means that the meal from yesterday was rapidly depleted. Fatigue hits him in a wave, and he basically falls over where he stands, too tired to explore any more.

Derek wanders over and sits upright around him, so that Stiles is pushed against the warm fur of his belly, a paw braced on each side of him. Stiles doesn't let himself think about how close he probably is to Derek's furry wolf dick and just stares out into the trees, eyes half closed. It's nearing fully dark, and he can hear the others dashing around in the woods. It sounds like they've found something to hunt, and Stiles finds that the thought of tearing into a wild animal and eating it raw doesn't seem so disgusting in this form. Actually, it might even be downright appetizing. Like the cricket, maybe. Huh.

When they return, Tank is in the lead, two limp rabbits drooping from his jaws. Erica has a mouthful of feathers, some kind of bird, and Isaac bounds along behind them, looking excited and worried in tiring turns. Derek leaves Stiles where he lies and goes up to Tank, butting his head in approval and emitting a short series of quiet barks. Erica drops her bird next to the rabbits, and sits down, tongue lolling, as she gets her due. Isaac gets a head butt as well, and rolls over to show his belly accordingly, eyes slitted in bliss when Derek briefly bites at his throat before turning back to the dead animals.

Stiles doesn't like that submissive display, finds his lips have drawn back again and don't relax until Derek has picked out a fat rabbit and brought it back to Stiles, sinking down beside him. The

others wait politely until Derek has torn into the belly of the rabbit before going at the other two carcasses, playfully tussling as they eat.

Like the night before, Derek carefully pulls out tender offal for Stiles, snapping it into partially chewed mouthfuls before he spits it in front of Stiles' front feet. Stiles eats hungrily, trying not to care that his meal is still hot and there's blood everywhere, and *what is he doing*. Also, something in him is weirdly proud to be fed in such a manner, and he can't resist looking smugly over at the other three wolves every once in a while, food half chewed in an open mouth, to see them watching him right back from the corners of their own eyes. Swallowing doesn't hurt as much as it had the day before, and the pre-chewing that Derek is doing both gross and helpful, but it still hurts, and his stomach is small. He's quickly done.

Stiles goes to the stream to wash it down. He sees really well in the dark, which is amazing. Everything is shades of gray, but it's sharp and clear, like using night-vision goggles (which he now has built in, essentially, and how cool is that?). His eyes dart to all the motion, the wind-blown grass, moonlight catching on rushing water. His ears precede his eyes, swiveling wildly to note all the noises, connecting them with what he can see, what he can smell. The night is alive around them, and it's fascinating. But also overwhelming, and he soon returns to Derek, who has been calmly monitoring him while he eats.

Stiles sits awkwardly nearby, watching Derek consume all but the bones in a matter of minutes. Stiles' muzzle and paws are wet (he had to go into the creek legs first to get close enough to drink), so he licks at himself for a bit, trying to chew the water out. Derek finishes his meal and glides over to the stream for a drink. Stiles sits upright, watching everything around him with an interest that is considerably dulled by fatigue, but feeling fairly safe under Derek's watchful eye.

Derek shakes his head after his drink, and Stiles can hear the pattering droplets that fly from his fur to the ground around him. When he returns he stretches, forward and back (Stiles thinks of doing yoga at PE one semester, and Downward Facing Dog, and how appropriately that stretch is named, now that he thinks about it.), wheezing though a sated yawn, and then gives an impatient sounding grumble before heading into the cave, flashing red eyes at Stiles for a second before he turns.

Stiles stands up a little uncertainly. He isn't sure if Derek meant for him to follow, but a quick glance shows the remaining wolves staring at him with varying degrees of judgement and curiosity, and so he nervously skitters in Derek's wake.

When the others come into the cave shortly thereafter, Stiles is once again snug between Derek's forelegs where they stretch out before his prone body. Derek lifts his head and whuffs at his pack. Stiles shrinks back, burying himself deeper in Derek's ruff as the three slink in, but they heed Derek's warning growl and throw themselves down at his side and back, piling together for warmth and security but carefully not touching the small creature so assiduously guarded by their leader.

Stiles closes his eyes and focuses more on the warm fur tickling his nose and ears than the slow burn of all of his aches and pains. He can hear, not only the breathing and heartbeats of the four wolves, but also the gurgling of their digestion, the gentle settling of their fur as they sink into slumber. He's pretty sure he can hear the blood rushing through Derek's veins, even. He lets that surging rhythm drag him down into sleep.

PART TWO Back to Beacon Hills

Chapter Notes

Hullo my darlings. I'm sorry to be a day late. My in-laws were here for the holiday weekend, and feeling very *chatty*, so I never got a chance to post. I also never answered your numerous lovely comments from the last chapter, but I've read them all *several times*, and many of your interpretations of Stiles' attitude had me snorting over my keyboard. Y'all give me so much joy.

Welcome to Part 2, wherein we get our boys back into town and start with the adjustment and recovery phase, along with trying to find the missing hunters. I'm having a bit of a block right now, struggling with Ch. 24. I'm glad I've got so much buffer, because I spent the last two weeks staring at it vacillating wildly between rage and despair. Hopefully I'll get over the hump this week.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Part 2: In Which It Is Not So Easy to Come Back to the Real World

Derek permits himself to sleep deeply, giving his body time to heal the remaining damage inflicted by the hunters, thankful for the respite, the food, the heat and comfort of his pack. He knows that Boyd is alert, understanding that he is on guard for the night; and Derek sleeps better than he has for over a week because of it. When he does finally open his eyes, it's with some degree of confusion. The form buried in the longer fur of his ruff is shaking and jolting, panting unevenly, and the mordant scent of panic emanates from it in waves. In the first second, before Derek remembers where he is and what has happened, he thinks the trembling creature is a pup, and begins rumbling to soothe it before he recalls that it is Stiles.

Stiles, still a strange tiny animal, lurches upright and leaps away, bounding almost like a rabbit, and his racing heart is reminiscent of that animal as well. Derek rises slowly, trying not to frighten Stiles further, but the terrified sub bounds away again, propelling himself off a lumpy outcropping of the cave wall, and erratically tears out of the mouth of the cave.

Derek gives chase instinctively, snarling out a warning to *Stop*, and *Be still*. It is a stupid move, and Stiles startles further, racing across the small clearing and into the underbrush with an uncanny lack of sound. The betas wake up at Derek's growl and begin to bay and bark as well, hurling themselves into the chase without even realizing what the quarry might be.

Ignoring his pack, Derek slides through the shrubs and tree trunks, eyes on brief flashes of white fur through the brush, nose following the hot scent of *fear* and *prey*. He howls, and the betas join him.

With this elemental cacophony, the hunt is on, weaving through the rosy pink light of a winter dawn.

Chased by four enormous wolves, Stiles runs in spooked bewilderment until he can't run anymore, too breathless to even try to yip for mercy. He's swamped in animal instinct (*run, hide, suss out the smallest paths*) trying to lose the big animals at his heels, drowning in a suffocating whirlpool of fear and pain. He wriggles through a patch of brambles, belly dragging on stony dirt, and smells what he knows is water up ahead. Thinking, in some blurry way, to use it, he darts in that direction and, before he can stop himself, stumbles headlong over the abrupt edge of a steep bank.

Silent, he falls, bouncing off stone and root until he splashes into frigid water. The shock of it is so intense that he freezes completely, not even able to breathe, which is a good thing, since he would have sucked in a lungfull of icy creek. He bobs quickly to the surface, his fur not having lost its insulating layer of air just yet. After a disorienting moment, he blinks his eyes and gasps for breath. The water is so cold it *hurts*, and Stiles has trouble instructing his legs to move. But the will to live is ingrained, and his body takes over, begins to struggle against the current. He cannot touch the bottom, is too confused for a plan, just thrashes around and battles to stay upright.

There's a huge splash behind him: waves surge forward and roll Stiles under once more. When he claws his way up again, more slowly this time, weighed down with water as his fur soaks through, he hears the jarring sound of breathless cursing behind him.

"Jesus fuck," Derek shouts, shifting to human once he's leaped into the little brook, the arctic shock of it startling these uncensored words from his mouth. He splashes around for a moment, regaining his equilibrium, quickly locates his quarry and lunges downstream to get him. He sweeps Stiles up only a moment later, and stands fully upright, the water only to his waist. "Fuck," he says again. "Fuck. Stiles, I'm sorry." He holds the struggling animal to his chest, gently squeezing the cold water from his tail, pressing it out of his sodden fur as best he can, striding against the current to get to a more accessible bank.

"Stiles, settle *down*," he orders impatiently. Stiles bites him hard in response, kicking out to get away, scratching at him with his sharp little nails. "Gods, it's cold," Derek mutters. He stalks out of the water, ignoring the twigs and stones under his feet, and is immediately crowded by Erica, Boyd and Isaac, all three still milling about on four legs. They range in a semi-circle, looking a little wolfishly foolish as the instinct to chase abates and they realize what they've done.

All of them, Derek included.

Derek squeezes more water from Stiles' coat and scowls at them. "Back to the cave," he orders. Isaac leads the way, followed by Boyd, while Erica more reluctantly falls in line, with several backward, speculative looks.

Derek pries Stiles' jaws off of his hand as he walks. "I'm sorry, Stiles," he says again, but he sounds more irritated than regretful. He's sorry about that, too, but an ice-cold bath in the early dawn is *not* how he'd anticipated the morning would go. He shakes the water out of his hair and holds tightly to the squirming bundle against his chest. It takes longer to get to the cave than it had to fall into the creek, and Derek's in a foul mood when they get there.

Erica shifts back, sly and challenging. "So, boss, are we gonna adopt it or eat it? Make up your mind."

"Shut up, Erica." Derek very delicately wraps his free hand around Stiles' muzzle, careful in case the bone hasn't yet knit itself back together. Stiles' neck is still a mess of scabs, so Derek rather doubts it. "Stiles, calm down, you're hurting yourself." He works his fingers under Stiles' waterlogged coat even as he speaks, and veins appear in black relief up the length of his arm as soon as he touches clammy skin. Stiles' pain is significant, and Derek sinks to his knees as he draws it out, brow knitted and breath coming shorter.

Isaac grips his shoulder. "Alpha? I can take some?" he offers. Derek shakes his head and powers through the second-hand pain, until Stiles is relaxed and limp on his supporting arm. He blinks encroaching gray out of his vision and swallows hard a few times until the headache and nauseous cramping fade away. Stiles' eyes are half closed after his pain drain, thoroughly narcotized, and Derek thinks he may perhaps have gone too far. The poor creature isn't even shivering anymore: this could be dangerous.

Derek places him on the ground long enough to stretch into his wolf body, and is immediately grateful for his thick fur coat. He's dry now, after an entire shift cycle, and all the warmer for it. He sets to work on Stiles, licking and nibbling at his fur until he's merely damp, rather than drenched, and he and his pack rest for a while as Stiles warms up, tucked securely against Derek's belly.

After a couple more hours of rest, Derek lifts his head to stare sleepily as Erica sashays back into the cave, wearing nothing but her human skin. It takes him a moment to notice that Stiles' collar dangles challengingly from her fingers. "Heeeey.... What's this, boss?"

For a beat, Derek can't breathe. He'd flung the damn thing away yesterday in a fit of rage, and honestly never wanted to think about it again. The thick black leather is obscene, draped over her delicate fingers, her blood-red nails an accent too appropriate to consider. The collar remains entire: the buckle and padlock form an ugly, iron wart on one side, and on the other, the lead ring swings like a taunt. Even from here he can smell old blood, pus and sweat on it. It is an abomination stinking of camphorous misery and sour fear; the rot of sordid, covetous Doms. It is surprising that Erica can bear to touch such a thing, much less do it so casually.

Derek has known his betas are less sensitive than he to the subtle undercurrents of scent, and here lies more proof.

Eyes locked on the collar, Derek snarls rabidly, leaping up (only barely remembering to be careful not to hurt Stiles, who had settled between his forelegs) and snatching the cursed leather from her grip with his teeth. The hair on his neck stands up, an urgent electricity that communicates to every raging cell in his body. He stalks stiffly to the mouth of the cave and out to the stream before tossing it into the water, emoting ferocity all the while.

He growls continually, and when he returns he bares his teeth to Erica's shocked and wide-eyed gaze, before curling again around Stiles. He's so riled up that it takes a moment to slow his

breathing, to calm the frantic firing of nerves under his skin. He works his nose into Stiles' damp fur and inhales the comforting cocktail of ginger and loam that has come to mean so much to him in such a short time.

His tension gradually slackens to the point where he can stop growling and look at his beta once again.

"Okay," she says slowly, doing a passable job of disguising her fear. "Message received." But she'll only drop it for now. Typical Erica. Derek, who knows his betas well, decides to ignore the entire incident for as long as he can.

Boyd wisely wanders outside to play four-legged sentry, escaping the tension in the cave. After a moment, Erica shifts and goes with him. Isaac, wolf-shaped once more, diffidently snugs himself around Derek and his charge, careful not to touch the small creature, but close enough to provide heat and protection. Derek licks him on the nose in thanks, before turning his attention to grooming Stiles and calming himself.

The sun isn't much higher in the sky when Derek rises and sheds his fur, stretching luxuriously in the brisk air of the cave. He pulls on his pants, socks and shoes and then rolls his neck like he's warming up, ready to take on the outside world once more. "Let's get to the car," he says.

Isaac sits on his haunches, watching as Derek cradles Stiles (who is mostly dry but still addled and noodly from the intense surcease of pain earlier) before scrambling to his feet and trotting out of the cave. Erica and Boyd melt out of the forest and wait, heads cocked attentively, for Derek to give his order.

"Time to go," he says simply, and then wends his way through the trees as his pack trots down the mountain, easily keeping pace with their casual lope. Stiles opens his eyes and dreamily watches the scenery flow by, but doesn't make any move to escape, and Derek absently strokes him as he strides downhill, exercise keeping him adequately warm in the winter chill despite being shirtless.

They reach the car in less than an hour, and Derek waits for Erica to shift and hand him the keys, hidden in brush nearby. When he unlocks the Camaro, the three betas swiftly get dressed, Erica for once in practical jeans and sweatshirt, and Derek smirks a bit at the thought of her abandoning her leather corsets out of concern for him.

Erica and Isaac slip into the back, curling easily into the limited space, and Boyd politely pulls his seat forward to give Isaac a little more legroom. Derek slumps into the driver's seat and carefully settles Stiles across his thighs.

"Anyone bring a shirt for me?" he asks.

"Sorry," Isaac begins, but Derek shakes his head before he can continue.

"It's alright, you couldn't have known."

"Want me to take the... your... pup?" Boyd asks.

"He's not a pup," Derek answers, sliding his keys into the ignition and beginning to feel normal for the first time in a week. "His name is Stiles."

Boyd shrugs casually and lifts his eyebrows. Derek hasn't answered his question.

Derek says, shortly, “No, I’ve got him,” and doesn’t examine his reluctance to let anyone else near the sub. Everything is always more complex when he’s human, with pesky nuances and social considerations that never bother him as a wolf. He shifts the car into gear and then pauses, stopped short. “Um,” he begins. “I don’t.”

Erica laughs, the sassy little bitch, and hands him her phone, navigation already queued up. “Wondered when you were gonna realize you didn’t know where you were.”

Derek bites his tongue and scowls. “Where *are* we, then?” he asks.

“Oregon. State timber reserve.” Boyd replies laconically. “Bout two hours from Beacon Hills. No towns nearby.”

Derek is grateful that pack bonds had helped to transmit his howl yesterday morning, because the betas couldn’t have *literally* heard it from this far away. (He will kick himself later for not even thinking to try howling for them while they were imprisoned. Although, they’d likely have been slaughtered as soon as they showed up, so there *is* that.)

The drive is quiet, Derek relating the bare bones of what happened while he was missing. The pack will need the names and descriptions of the hunters, of course, need to know what to watch out for, what his captors had been planning to do as far as Derek could ascertain. (Jesus, they were going to make him bite a hunter to cure his illness? What the fuck was up with these freaks? Hypocritical much?) He doesn’t realize that hasn’t mentioned Stiles at all until he wraps it up.

There are a few long moments of silence before Erica, brash as usual, points that out. “Soooo, boss, what about the puppy in your lap? You gonna tell us about him?”

Stiles, who is more awake now, but has lain quietly on Derek’s thigh, pushes himself up, forelegs straightened out against the gentle rocking of the car, and stares at Erica around his bicep, a touch smug. She growls at him, just a little, and Boyd reaches back and swats at her. “Erica,” he says repressively. Boyd, in spite of (or perhaps because of) being the quiet one, has always picked up on undertones better than the others.

Derek pulls one hand off the wheel and sets it heavily on Stiles’ back.

“They had him before they got me,” he answers

“Is this about that collar?” Erica is twirling a length of her hair around one finger, looking thoughtful. “They had a sub, maybe? I don’t-”

Derek can’t repress his growl. “He *wasn’t theirs*. He was a hostage,” Derek’s voice has grown gravelly, he’s fighting back his fangs and choking on his fury. “A captive just as I was.” He stops for a moment, trying to recover his equilibrium, surprised at how angry he feels.

The atmosphere in the car shifts to shock, and pity, the soft, powdery scent of it scarcely soothing.

“They... *killed a sub?*” Boyd growls, evidently focusing on the past tense. He grows rigid in his seat, hands fistng against his thighs.

“What. No!” Derek answers quickly, not needing his betas freaked out and on the warpath. “No, that’s not. *This is the sub.*” He smooths his hand over the narrow sweep of Stiles’ skull, toys with his ears. “This is Stiles.”

"What is he?" Boyd asks, patient and dogged. "Some kind of were-, uh, were-thing?"

"I don't know," Derek admits, curling his fingers into Stiles long fur, which is fluffing up now in the blowing heat of the car vents. "I gave him the Bite, but, I don't know what happened."

"You gave him the Bite?" Erica sounds shocked. "Why?"

"Shut up," Derek mutters. "Circumstances don't matter." He doesn't want to talk about how he'd been forced into biting the boy, manipulated by Stiles' fear and desperation. He gently fingers the raw skin on Stiles' neck and muses, almost to himself, "If he'd become a wolf, the collar could have killed him."

"I didn't know there were other things you could be," Boyd says tentatively, after a long pause. "Besides a wolf, I mean."

Derek's mouth twists, and he hesitates before replying. "I didn't either, Boyd." His family dying so suddenly and completely when he was young left him profoundly uninformed on so many counts that his only defense against his shameful ignorance was to be aggressive and distracting.

Erica leans between the seats and stares down at Stiles, who stares back up. "Wait.... I know a sub named Stiles," she says slowly. "Oh. My. God. He's the only fucking male sub at school. *Stiles*. I can't fucking believe it. His dad is the Sheriff, right?"

Derek nods. "That's what the hunters said."

"What, Stiles didn't tell you himself? That's surprising," Erica laughs a little cruelly. "He never shuts up."

Derek snaps his teeth at her before he's aware he was going to do anything, viscerally reacting to her sneering attitude. "He's mute," he says. "Can't talk. I only know his name because I heard those... assholes... using it."

"What?" Erica has wisely and immediately retreated from biting distance, sitting stiffly back in her seat. "What do you mean?"

"He's injured, maybe? I don't know, Erica. It's not like he could tell me. He. can't. talk."

"Well shit," Erica breathes, sympathy tightening her face.

"He's in bad shape," Isaac murmurs compassionately. "I didn't realize he was a sub."

Derek notices Boyd, ever sharp and quiet, examining Stiles' neck, the naked, damaged skin there. "He wore that collar until he shifted?" he asks soberly. When Derek hums an affirmative, Boyd whistles low, "They hurt him bad," is all he says, and Derek nods in agreement. They had indeed.

They're quiet for the next hour, just some bickering between Erica and Isaac, and Boyd turning the radio on low. Stiles slumps back into sleep, and Derek keeps a hand on him whenever he's not actively shifting gears. He thinks about what he needs to do when they get back to Beacon Hills. Coax Stiles to shift back to human. Bring him to his parents, who have to be wild with worry. Derek considers how he can possibly explain about Stiles' new ability to shift into this tiny, big-eared canid and scowls fiercely. The full moon isn't for two more weeks, thank goodness, and he'd

like to keep Stiles with the pack until after that, but he can't find it in himself to let the boys' parents remain oblivious to his rescue for that long. They must be devastated.

It's barely afternoon when they cross the city limits of Beacon Hills, and Derek feels something that's been coiled tight within his gut for the past week begin to slowly unwind. It's good to be back in his own territory. He detours by an In-and-Out to load everyone up with burgers and fries before they go to the loft. There's no telling what might be in the fridge. Isaac generally does the shopping, but it's been an exceptional week, there's no doubt, and Derek isn't counting on it.

Stiles perks up at the smell of the food, and begins snatching curly fries out of Derek's bag, ferret-like and sassy with his pointed nose and slyly laughing sideways glances. He eats messily and with gusto. Derek doesn't stop him, just shakes the fries out of the box onto his thigh to make it easier for the boy. The betas watch, but make no comment as he breaks off very small pieces of the burger as well, setting them one by one on his leg as they are devoured.

The loft, when they finally get there, might be the best thing he's seen in days and days, and Derek wastes no time parking the car and slipping out, walking faster than might be purely dignified to climb the stairs, Stiles tucked against him. The betas pile out behind him, Boyd and Isaac gathering up the trash and detouring to the dumpster. Erica lingers to wait for them.

So Derek is still alone when he gets to the rolling door, sliding its great weight effortlessly. He closes his eyes for a moment, senses whirling with relief at the smell of his den, warm and safe and filled with the comforting essence of pack. It's a mess, but he would have expected that, if the betas had been out searching for him for the past week. Somehow the mess makes it more welcoming, more real, and Derek steps across the threshold with a deep sigh, feeling exhaustion strike him like a blow, finally able to relax enough to succumb to it.

Stiles lifts his head, nose twitching and ears at full alert. His eyes dart everywhere, all his senses feeding him information about the place. His ears flick backwards as the betas crowd behind Derek, forcing him to move further inside. Derek rolls his shoulders and then his neck and then turns to give a mock glare at the betas. "It's a wreck in here," he growls.

Erica begins to argue (of course), but he holds a hand up to stop her. "Ah-ah," he chides. "I don't care. Just. Clean it up a little. I'm gonna take a shower." He leaves them immediately, climbing the stairs three at a time towards the bathroom, already imagining the feel of hot water, washing away the dirt and sweat and blood and fear that he can still feel on his skin, in spite of the morning's dunking in the creek. He kicks the door shut behind him and sets Stiles on the bathmat. "You need a shower, too," he says firmly. "You can get in with me, or you can shift back and take one yourself. Whatever you prefer."

Stiles looks constipated for a moment, little face contorting with the attempt to express human emotion. Finally he just gives himself a little shake and sits down with his back to Derek. But he's facing the tub, so Derek doesn't know whether to interpret the move as rejection or invitation. He'd do the same thing in either case, so he doesn't worry too much about it, just sheds his boots and jeans, turning on the Hot as he peels off his socks.

When the water is the right temperature, he steps inside, turning to scoop Stiles in as well before pulling the shower curtain closed and switching the water stream from the faucet to the shower.

Stiles immediately retreats to the far end of the tub and glares indignantly at Derek, who just laughs and moves under the spray. He quickly and thoroughly scrubs his body and hair, physically and emotionally sloughing off the terrible days they'd shared. When he's done, opening his eyes,

he notices that Stiles gaze is firmly fixed at groin level, little pink tongue hanging unconsciously from the corner of his muzzle, mouth dropped half open as it had often been when he was human.

Derek smirks, and the sense memory of Stiles' body, lithe and desperate against his own, has his cock plumping against his leg. Before he can get carried away, he lifts the showerhead from its hook and squats next to Stiles, drenching him with no warning. The little animal jerks back, breath sharp in his throat, and then stares up at Derek's face, wounded and pissed. Derek grins. "I'll be quick," he promises.

It's not all that fast, though. Stiles' fur is very thick, and quite long, and Derek thinks he uses half a bottle of his scent-free shampoo, lathering him up and rinsing dirt and blood down the drain. Stiles struggles, snapping at Derek's fingers as they wander all over his body, trying to scrub him clean.

"*Down!*" Derek orders, with an edge of the *voice*, and Stiles flops immediately to his side, belly up. Before he can begin his uncomfortable routine of squirming back upright and then submitting again over and over, Derek closes his hand solidly around Stiles' ribs, immobilizing him. "Good," he croons, letting water flow warm and gentle over his own hand and through Stiles' fur. "So good for me, Stiles, look at you."

Stiles relaxes, then, allowing Derek to move him this way and that, responding to orders such as *stand* and *now turn around* without complaint, and the scent of his pleasure rises, even through the steam and shampoo, as Derek hums and praises him, hands firm and knowledgeable as they clean his body.

He doesn't comment on how much a drenched Stiles resembles a drowned rat with enormous ears.*

Stiles remains quiescent until he's been towed dry, and then resumes glaring at Derek, as if insulted that Derek slipped through his defenses and relaxed him. Derek bites his lip over a smile and swallows his teasing *sorry*. Stiles needs to learn that submitting to him isn't at all the same as being forced to submit to the hunters. So he ignores the glare and continues to pet and praise as a reward, which Stiles pretends not to enjoy.

He walks naked to his room, plops Stiles lightly on his bed, and pulls out a black undershirt (the heating in the loft feels a little suffocating after being trapped in that freezing cellar for so long) and pair of sleep pants, so simply happy to be wearing clean clothes that he has to catch his breath. He can hear the betas downstairs, tidying up take out containers and school books, folding blankets and pillows. Stiles can clearly hear them as well, ears flickering and twisting with each quiet comment. They're wondering what sort of animal he is, wondering how he happened to be there with Derek; and Erica, of course, is making sly and crass insinuations as to their relationship. Derek is too tired and too grateful to be home to call her to task.

There are no first aid supplies in his home, of course, so he has nothing to put on Stiles' various wounds. They look improved, however, just from being cleaned; and Derek thinks Stiles is healing much faster than a human or animal typically would, even though it seems glacially paced for a werewolf. He revises his plan to fit in a stop at Deaton's, to get whatever medical attention Stiles might need, and perhaps to pick his brain a little on the topic of were-*things* springing up where a were *wolf* should rightly be.

Meanwhile, he sits on the bed next to Stiles, who has been watching him with bright, attentive eyes, and says, "You should shift back, Stiles, so I can take you to your parents."

Stiles' ears flatten, sticking sadly out to either side like dolorous levers, and his eyes lower for a moment. His scent spikes with sorrow, and Derek cannot stop himself from stroking through his

soft fur, trying to offer comfort. “What is it? You don’t want to go back?” He’s confused, why would Stiles be sad at the thought of getting back to his family? Are they... abusive? Like Isaac’s?

Stiles stares at him again and then heaves a little sigh, licking at Derek’s fingers. Derek waits, but Stiles does nothing more than chew thoughtfully on his thumb, which Derek wiggles gently in his mouth, smiling when Stiles snaps a little harder. *Just like a pup*, Derek thinks.

He misses his little sister and cousins terribly in that moment.

“I’ve always transitioned easily from human to wolf,” he says quietly, a little later. “I was born this way, you know. Shifting was just. Natural. So it’s a little hard for me to tell you how to do it. Boyd, Erica and Isaac are Made, though, and I got it across to them. So.”

Stiles moves on to chewing his middle two fingers, and Derek flashes a grin before continuing. “It works best, I think, if you dwell on the things that make you human. Think about the stretch of your legs and your back as you stand up straight, think about your fingers and thumbs and the ways that you use them.” Stiles bites sharply, teasingly, and Derek pulls his fingers away to flick reprovingly at Stiles flank. “Pay attention Stiles.”

After a moment of tussle, Derek continues, “You’re trying to shift: think about your parents. Your family. Do you have siblings? Brothers or sisters? Maybe imagine yourself in the living room with them, talking with your human mouth, gesturing with your human arms. And then, when you’ve got these thoughts clearly in your mind, just. *Push*. Push yourself and flow, let your body move and transition from one form to the other. It’s like. Um. Stretching, I think. You kind of tense up and then release, pull yourself tight and then kind of *expand*.”

Stiles looks up at him, but nothing happens.

“Are you even trying?” Derek asks, disgruntled. “I don’t think you’re even trying.”

Stiles rolls his liquid black eyes and gives Derek a doggy smirk before looking meaningfully over the edge of the bed.

Derek tries to coach him through the shift a few more times, but Stiles doesn’t seem interested, and Derek doesn’t think he could or *should* Dom the boy into doing it. He finally grunts in frustration and helps Stiles down to the floor, where he clearly wants to be. Stiles moves stiffly and uncertainly, but slowly gets around, exploring Derek’s room. Derek stretches out on the carpet next to his bed and watches him, an unheeded smile tweaking just the corners of his mouth.

Chapter End Notes

* Warning for unbearable cuteness ahead. Here is [a video](#) of some potential bitty Stileses in a bathtub. And here's this:



(If I could make that woman's hands into Derek hands, it'd be posted right in the story.)

In which Stiles Is Pretty Sure He'll STAY This Way, Thank You

Chapter Notes

Here it is, my loves: the big reveal. (Which most of you have guessed already.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Stiles wakes up to the seductive aroma of coffee, curling around corners and into the room where he sleeps. He's lost in a sea of blankets and pillows, and when he staggers upright it takes a moment to realize that he's on four paws rather than two feet. Movement and quiet conversation downstairs denote Derek and his pack, congregating in the kitchen (with the coffee! and no Stiles!) talking about what happened and what they need to do. Stiles still feels dizzy and weak, but the pain is a distant roar, and he faintly recalls Derek's large hands wrapped around his sides, draining his discomfort and filling him with the intoxicating balm of werewolf mojo before he curled back up for more sleep. He supposes Derek went ahead and got up at that time.

When Stiles wanders to the edge of the bed, he finds that Derek has considerably left a chair next to it, and a milk crate next to that, and then a couple of stacked books, making a kind of stairs that he can use to get down the floor. Stiles wants to roll his eyes, yet at the same time he is grateful that Derek had had the forethought: now he won't have to jump five times his body's height down. He might not hurt *right now*, but he knows he's not in good shape. He stumbles down his gimpy ramp like an arthritic old man (or dog) and then pads out of the room (The door is cracked open. Almost as if Derek might be accustomed to dealing with the temporarily four-legged and their needs. Huh.)

At the top of a spiral staircase, Stiles stops dead. It is metal, open at the risers, and he doesn't trust his stability enough not to slide from a step and drop to the floor below. He huffs and tries to whine or bark or, you know, *noise*, but nothing happens except for the ache of straining his throat. He scratches at the floor and glares towards where the voices are, pissed that he can't even call for help. He's just attempting to jump down the first step when the blonde girl bops into view, grinning in her sharp and uncomfortable way.

"Hey there, little pup," she chirps. "Stuck up there, aren't you?"

Stiles immediately pulls back and lifts a lip at her, set on acting like he'd never thought about coming down at all. (Except. Coffee!) She laughs at him, of course, and bending her knees, springs nearly to the top of the metal spiral, grasping the railing and vaulting lightly over it so that she rests only a few steps below Stiles. Stiles backs away immediately, ears falling flat and sideways, eyes suspiciously narrowed. He doesn't trust this girl at all.

She tosses her hair back and sits on the step above where she stood. "I'm in school with you, you know," she says conversationally. Stiles stares at her curiously. Huh. He'd *thought* she'd looked familiar. "I know who you are: Stiles Stilinski, the only male sub in Beacon Hills High." Stiles glares at her again, showing all his teeth now in a silent growl, but Erica ignores it and muses, "You're really different like this, aren't you? You've always been an odd one, Stiles Stilinski, and I suppose it's no surprise that you make an odd werewolf as well."

Stiles lifts his furry eyebrows, because she seems... friendly... and that's not how interactions usually go when the phrase 'male sub' enters the conversation.

"You helped me once," she says, as if she can read his surprise. "In third grade. You probably don't remember. But, I used to have seizures, a lot, and one time it happened in school..." she trails off, but Stiles *does* remember that, of course he does. There had been a small girl who always sat in the far corner of the elementary school cafeteria, and one day she'd dropped her tray with the kind of clatter that usually resulted in the whole room clapping and hooting; but she'd followed it down dramatically, crashing to the floor while jerking around in a terrifying way. It hadn't lasted long, and the teachers hadn't made it over yet. Stiles had been sitting nearby, and found himself utterly unable to leave the poor kid alone in her puddle of urine. He'd slipped out of his chair and knelt beside her, holding her hand and brushing the hair off her face. He'd stayed there, silent and scared and sympathetic, until the school nurse and the custodian had carried her away.

He nods to say he remembers, and Erica smiles a little at him. "Most kids just made fun of me," she says musingly. "I always related to you, a little bit, once you'd presented. Another disgusting freak, huh, like me."

She holds her hand out then, low and slowly, and Stiles noses it gently (not enough to hurt himself, because anything to do with his nose he still needs to approach with caution). "Want me to help you down?" she asks.

Stiles blinks and then takes a tiny step closer. She smells like vanilla and anise, sharp and sweet both. Something that reminds him of kitchens and cookies and the bright, sharp edges of cutlery. She's neutral, neither sub nor Dom. And while she previously came across as erratic and predatory, right now she's soft and smiling.

It's not that bad. Really. Her hands are cool and almost fragile; they hold him securely but without being overwhelming. He thinks about her in third grade, skinny, with terrible mousy hair and a mismatched sweatsuit covered in urine and chili and chocolate milk, her fear and humiliation making him feel sad and protective. He doesn't think he minds her carrying him, too much.

And yet, by the time they near the bottom of the staircase, he's nearly hyperventilating, shaking between her hands. As his brain blurs with increasing anxiety, he begins to confuse the loft space with the basement in the cabin, and the two men who held him down, beating and humiliating him, taunting him with the grief of his father.

But Derek is there at the bottom, and Erica thankfully hands him off with no fuss, and Stiles can gently wedge his nose into Derek's armpit, eyes tightly shut, trying hard to hold on to his sense of *now* and *place* and not be overwhelmed with fear. Derek says, weirdly polite and formal, "Thank you, Erica," and Stiles withdraws his nose enough to look up and blink some kind of traumatized thanks at her before hiding himself again in Derek's comforting, loamy scent, encircled by all those impressive muscles, protected.

He emerges when they reach the kitchen area, tempted out when Derek begins to offer him bits of scrambled egg and bacon. Stiles shamelessly, and messily, eats from his fingers, grumbles silently when Derek won't let him have any coffee. Entreating looks at the betas are fruitless. Stiles makes the big eyes: *I am only just back from being kidnapped and tortured, and the only thing that will make me feel better is some sweet, hot caffeine.* Nada. Even stoic Boyd laughs as he pulls his mug off the table and holds it protectively against his chest. Heartless bastards, the lot of them.



Derek pours some milk in a little bowl, but Stiles just turns a haughty back to it and goes back to his bacon, crunching noisily and obnoxiously. Nothing's worth drinking if it isn't coffee, and he's sticking to his guns, dammit. Screw them all for the evil, not-sharing werewolves they are. Let them suffer under the weight of his displeasure. Sadly, no one seems to be suffering too badly. (Note to self: the silent treatment is somewhat less effective when you're already mute. This thought makes him mournful.)

Even while eating, his ears track every noise, all the conversation. Derek is evidently going to take him to a vet named Deaton to check his injuries, which makes Stiles stiffen in offended disgust, and he swivels his ears at Derek, wrinkling his nose in a gesture that only makes him jolt in pain rather than leveling Derek with his pique. A vet, though? A *vet*? Come on!

Derek smirks as though he understands perfectly, and simply folds his hand around Stiles' head, covering his eyes and ears and nose. And although Stiles fully intends to jerk away, he finds himself settling instead. Long minutes pass. His other senses being cut off makes him sharpen his focus on the heat of Derek's hand, the weight of it on his fur, the scent of him familiar and reassuring. In spite of himself, Stiles finds that he's slowly growing limp, draped over Derek's forearm.

Although Stiles intends to resist the heavy hand that pins and blinds him, that stills and muffles his ears, it nonetheless has an intense effect on his submissive instinct. He's bound in a cage of Derek, the heat and strength and *surety* of him. Slowly, tension melts out of his bones, buzzing gently as it leaves him. Something about the way Derek holds him reads like a command: quiet, confident and inexorable. *Relax. Be Calm. There is nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing for you to do. Let it go, give your worries and your fears over to me. You are safe.*

At first, Stiles struggles with his response. Because he isn't a squawking parrot in a cage, for pity's sake, to go silent as soon as his owner has tossed a blanket over him. But the temptation to relax is too drugging, the lure of serenity and escape too siren to ignore for very long. Stiles is fed, and clean, and... slipping into the gently rocking waves of subspace.

The conversation in the kitchen continues, but subsides into background noise, only the rhythm of it helping shape the tempo of his buzzing little purrs.

When Derek finally removes his hand, and Stiles blinks himself back into the present, he slides a self-conscious sideways look at Erica as if daring her to tease him about it; but she just shoves a giant bite of bagel in her mouth and then stares innocently up at the ceiling.

Deaton-the-vet is not too far away. Less than 15 minutes in that sexy black beast of Derek's. The others are left in the loft, and now it's only Derek and Stiles. Stiles lies over one of Derek's thighs, under the steering wheel, reemerged from the impromptu visit to subspace, and is now less apprehensive because of it. (*Ohmygod. You're so easy*, he chides himself. Even though that is generally inaccurate: he's quite difficult to drop.)

The Beacon Hills Animal Clinic is a comfortable looking building of whitewashed brick. When Derek enters, Stiles shudders at a high pitched alarm, and his ears fold down instinctively to protect them from the painful noise. Strangely, no one else seems to notice it, even Derek. Stiles is still pawing at his ears in discomfort when a dark skinned man in a white lab coat and a shiny bald head strides into the small waiting room. He lifts an eyebrow and purses his lips when he notes that Stiles is reacting to the alarm, but then turns away.

The irritating alarm ceases, to Stiles' relief.

There are four other people in the room, holding dogs or cats (except for one elderly woman with an extremely fat miniature pig in her lap). "Ah, Mr. Hale," the man says, his voice jarringly light and soft. "I'd nearly canceled your appointment. Please step on back." He glances at the others in the waiting room as Derek eels past the swinging half-door he holds open. "I'll be with you all as quickly as I can."

"Dr. Deaton," Derek says in greeting as they enter an exam room with too much exposed brick to be entirely sanitary. (*Don't you tell me you can wipe down those walls, dude. What would animal-OSHA say?*)

"Derek," the man responds. His dark eyes are intent on Stiles, however, and he passes a thoughtful hand over his goatee. "Who is this?"

"Umm," Derek stutters, and he's the most uncertain that Stiles has ever seen him. "Stiles? I. We. I don't really know, but we just—"

The vet interrupts him. "Stiles. *Stilinski?* The missing boy?" His voice loses its tranquility, and rises in incredulous surprise.

Derek shrugs and then nods. His sheepish guilt floods the air, overripe and uncomfortably unctuous in the nose. Stiles directs a silent growl at the vet, not sure what Derek has to feel guilty about and irritated at the man for making him feel that way. Dr. Deaton raises an annoying eyebrow at Stiles and then politely moves a studied distance away.

"Alright, then," he says mildly, recovering himself. "Why don't you put him on the table. I can see that he's hurt. And you can tell me how you encountered him and why he's like this now." There's only a hint of judgement in his voice now.

Derek steps forward to put Stiles on the cold steel table, but Stiles grabs his fingers in his mouth, suddenly terrified to be left alone, needing physical contact. He'd be whining if he could, and scrabbles to get back against the solid protection of Derek's body.

Derek senses his fear, of course he does (because he is a good Dom, yes he is) and immediately sweeps Stiles up against his belly, so that his feet are still on the table, but the rest of him is comfortingly pressed against Derek. Deaton watches the interaction, but makes no comment, staying a few steps away from both of them, hands held peaceably at his sides, radiating calm and a very deliberate lack of violence.

When Stiles licks the edge of Derek's wrist, indicating that he's alright, Derek haltingly begins. "I was captured by hunters," he says. "I don't know who they were. Not Argents. Anyway, they brought me to a, um, cabin. And he - Stiles - was there as well. As a, you know - human. That was, a week ago? I'm pretty sure he was there longer than that, though." Derek pauses for too long, and Stiles peers up at him, seeing the reflection of his own liquid black eyes in Derek's multicolored irises. He listens to Derek's rising heart rate and licks him encouragingly once again.

Derek relaxes a bit and almost smiles at him before his face hardens back into ye olde serial killer standby and he continues, "They hurt him really badly, at the end, and I. He. Well. I bit him." His heart makes a leap-and-stutter combo that Stiles assumes is a response to the bald-faced lie, and he looks over at Deaton to see if he caught it.

As a human, Stiles would have been clueless, but with the incredibly heightened senses, not to mention animal intuition of his current shape, he's aware that Deaton isn't fully human himself. He reeks of humus and ancient woods, of power and patience, smells pondering and conniving and loving all at once. Stiles doesn't know *what* to make of him, and evidently Derek doesn't either, because he remains on high alert, even as he trusts the man enough to tell their story.

"You bit him," Deaton repeats with no discernable intonation. "And now he's a fennec fox."

Derek sucks in a surprised breath. "That's what he is? A fox? A... fennec... fox?"

Deaton looks at Stiles while Stiles stares challengingly back. The man isn't a Dom, although he's clearly not a sub either. Stiles doesn't know how to place him. He doesn't feel neutral. Deaton smiles gently at him, which makes Stiles bristle even more, and then returns his gaze to Derek.

"That is definitely a fennec fox," he says lightly. "The smallest member of the canid family, excluding the teacup breeds. They are desert dwellers found in the Sahara of Northern Africa, occasionally kept as exotic pets, which is the only way you'd find one on this continent, enormous ears to aid in hearing and heat dispersal both."

He reaches one finger towards Stiles' front foot, but doesn't touch. "You'll find hair on the bottoms of their feet as well, to protect him from hot desert sands. They eat insects and small rodents. They're not as much pack animals as wolves, although they do socialize in family units and engage in lifelong monogamous pairs." He emphasizes the last sentence a bit, but with a scarcely perceptible inhale, Derek moves right past that.

"How." Derek stops to clear his throat. "How did my bite turn him into an *African* fox?"

Deaton moves his finger again, this time hovering it above Stiles' neck. He doesn't answer directly, but wonders aloud, "His neck is damaged, Derek. Perhaps from a collar?"

Derek just stares at him, face expressionless, but Deaton forges ahead. "Stiles Stilinski is one of the few recognized male submissives in this town, is he not? He'd have been wearing a collar?"

Derek doesn't let Deaton touch the mess of swollen tissue and scabs that ring Stiles' neck, but he touches it himself, with the pad of his finger, so gently that it doesn't hurt, and nods.

"Was he wearing it when he transformed?"

Derek nods again.

"Perhaps it was necessary that he be smaller than a wolf, then," Deaton muses. "So that he didn't immediately choke when he shifted. Also, he looks extremely malnourished. It is likely he didn't have the physical and nutritional reserves to fuel sudden growth into a wolf, with its correspondingly demanding metabolism and systemic needs. Such a change could have sent him into shock, if not outright systemic failure." Deaton leans back and crosses his arms, still staring assessingly at Stiles. "As he is a submissive, he might reasonably be temperamentally inclined to hiding or fading into the background. It is possible that he needed to be small as a matter of survival."

Stiles huffs angrily at that, since he'd planned on being *large and dangerous* as a matter of survival, not small and utterly foreign. It's a fucking cosmic joke, is what it is. He'd rather be a giant, bitey, shocky, organ-failing wolf than a... fennec fox.

"Does this kind of... switch... happen often?" Derek asks.

Deaton shakes his head. "I've never heard of it happening in our time. There are stories, from a hundred years ago or more, of werewolves who were shapeshifters, taking on any form that they needed for safety or protection. Stories of people who were bitten taking on a form that better reflected who they were or what they needed than that of a wolf. But I'd always thought those to be legend." He shrugs a little and smiles faintly. "It is an honor to see that the old tales may be true."

Stiles is unimpressed, although he's glad to perhaps understand. He thinks that when he's human again he'd like to see whatever books it is that Deaton got his stories from. He drifts for a moment thinking of all the resources there may be for a supernatural world he'd never known existed, tales and songs and legends that he can read and tease apart.

"And then there is the fact that. Hmmm. Well." Deaton briefly rests his fingertips on the far side of the examination table, leaving little warm spots of condensation behind, and looks at Stiles quizzically. "Stiles, you heard the alarm that was triggered when you came in, did you not?"

Stiles nods warily, ears twitching in insult at the recollection of the thin, shrieking wail.

Low notes of patchouli-scented curiosity drift around him, coming from both Derek and the vet. Derek's hands tighten briefly before resuming stroking him.

"Huh," Deaton breathes. "That is very interesting indeed."

"I didn't hear anything," Derek interjects, sounding grumpy. (Ha, grumpywolf. He'll have to remember to use that one later.) Deaton's eyebrows scoot upwards (although they can't compete with the surly eloquence of Derek's).

"No." Deaton barely spares the Alpha a glance. "You would not." He returns his focus to Stiles. "Tell me, Stiles, are there witches or sparks in your family?"

Stiles scrunches his face up, because *what even is that?* His animal form must be expressive enough, because Deaton makes another little *huh* and something about him relaxes, although the tickle of curiosity doesn't diminish.

Deaton sits on a chair near the exam table, so that his head isn't much higher than Stiles' and stares at him intently. "Stiles," he says. "My name is Alan Deaton. And although we've not met before, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I care not only for the animals, but also the supernatural here in Beacon Hills, and was the pack emissary for the Hales for decades before this." He pauses and lets Stiles take that in, and Stiles wishes he could ask what the hell 'emissary' means.

"You are hurt," Deaton adds softly, hands folded on his lap. "I can see that you're not healing as a werewolf would. The rest can wait, but for now, would you permit me to do what I can to help you?"

Stiles waits a bit, but the man smells only of sincerity and curiosity, with nothing sordid or dangerous about him, and at last Stiles nods. Dr. Deaton coaxes him away from Derek's hands, and the next half an hour is filled with probing, weighing (holy crap, he weighs two and a half pounds, how is that even possible?), ointment, and x-rays. Deaton is gentle and impersonal as he pokes and prods, while Derek drones on about how Stiles cannot speak, lists all the injuries he was aware of Stiles suffering during his captivity. Stiles closes his eyes in misery as Derek chokes over recounting his beatings, the black eye and broken nose and concussion and then, in a voice so low and cracking that Deaton has to lean close to hear him, the incident with the Sharpie.

"Hmmmm. Can you drop him, Derek?" Deaton asks, carefully gauging Stiles' shivering misery and tightly wound body language. "I believe it will make the remainder of this examination easier on him."

When Derek nods, Deaton peels off his latex gloves and steps back. "I'll leave the room for a few minutes," he says. "Gather some supplies and give you privacy."

So Derek strokes Stiles, whispers praise and endearments while palming his head, closing his hand around Stiles' mouth and ears and eyes, as he had done during breakfast. Stiles is held in place, world darkened and muffled. The mounting discomforts from the exam are drained away through Derek's insanely awesome werewolf mojo. Stiles relaxes until Derek fills his world: the pain is gone and Stiles' body and mind are both no more than a euphoric buzz, neutral and still, careless of anything beyond the presence and soothing touch of his Dom. There are other touches on his body, then, but Stiles doesn't concern himself with that, only with the indomitable force that holds him down and protects him.

Stiles is limp and fatigued when Derek brings him out of subspace. Deaton is gone, and there are bandages wrapped, cool and soothing, around his neck and different places on his body. “Deaton says you’re healing faster than any human or animal would otherwise,” he murmurs as Stiles blinks him into focus. “But we need to be patient. Especially with your voice. You’ve got a broken nasal bone and also a fractured hyoid.” Stiles lolls his tongue out and blinks to show he understands, although, really, it’s rather difficult because he’s in such a state of glorious lassitude. He tries to determine if he’s drooling. That’d be so embarrassing. He’d really like nothing better than to stop thinking altogether and have a cozy nap with Derek. Pshht. Right. When does Stiles get that kind of luck?

Derek smoothes careful hands over him once more. “And he says you’ll shift back to human when you’re ready. That. trauma can sometimes. That you might feel safer this way.” Stiles gives a doggy grimace to indicate *duh*, but finds that his purr is going strong regardless. And that’s fine, because the purring vibrations make Derek smile, wide and uninhibited, which is reward enough.

“Let’s go try to find your family now,” Derek says. “There’s only one Stilinski residence in town, so that must be you.”

Stiles glances at the clock, which reads 11:30am, but has no idea what day it is, doesn’t know if his dad will be home or not. Derek carefully rises, Stiles secured against his chest, and Deaton nods soberly at them as they pass in the hall. “Good luck, Alpha Hale” he says. “And keep me informed, alright? I’d like to talk with Stiles once he’s in a condition to do so.”

Derek nods back at him, but Stiles isn’t convinced he’d be stopping back at the vet clinic for much less than physical disaster. The relationship between the Alpha and the enigmatic vet seems civil but a bit cold and strained. Stiles wonders what the story there is.

The ride to Stiles’ home doesn’t take long, and when they park, Stiles stands with his back feet braced against Derek’s thigh, staring through the window at his house, for the first time in what feels like *literal. geologic. epochs*.

“Come on,” Derek mutters. He smells of reluctance and trepidation, which Stiles doesn’t really understand, because. Dad! But Derek doesn’t delay, girding himself for conflict and carefully shutting the door to the Camaro so that he doesn’t deafen Stiles in the process. They’re up the porch steps and ringing the bell before Stiles can prepare himself, and he pants excitedly in Derek’s arms when he hears the heavy footsteps of his father approaching.

The door opens, and John Stilinski looks out. He’s drawn and sallow, dark circles pulling under glassy eyes, and his shoulders are slumped with grief even more than fatigue.

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY, amirite? Stiles is back with his Daddy. Wonder how that’s gonna go... .

In other news: instead of working on my new chapter this weekend, I got distracted cruising the #brain damage tag (don’t judge me!) and came across a complete (technically pre-Sterek, but really, it’s got Sterek all over it) gem, [Burnt Marshmallow](#) by [Cuba Endeavour](#), which is sadly under-recognized, and you should all go read it, because all the *feels*, and how awesome

everyone is, and all the frustration and the fear and the utter commitment all your favorite characters have to making Stiles better.

How do you lovelies find new works to read? My favorite thing (besides reading an author's entire catalog and then going through all their bookmarks: such a jackpot when an author has shitpiles of bookmarks) is finding a tag, sorting (by bookmarks or kudos) and then hitting whatever fics have good summaries and are in my various fandoms. (Preferably long, preferably E, but I'm not too rigid.) It's actually a good way to find new fandoms, if a summary is really intriguing. (I think that's how I discovered Eruri in Attack on Titan. That or fanart over on Tumblr.) This is a great strategy for finding well-written older works, or super-popular ones, but not so good if a fic is new, or if, like the one above, it somehow never got on the fandom radar.

Dad, the Explanation & the Demonstration

Chapter Notes

Y'all, we just got art! The incomparable and generous **JaidenWC** whipped up an utterly adorable Wolf!Derek protecting teeny fox!Stiles. I'm so *giddy!* Y'all go tell her how wonderful she is!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Derek shifts uncomfortably under the Sheriff's sharpening gaze. He is unmistakably a powerful Dom, and it's easy to discern his many years in law enforcement: in spite of his evident exhaustion, he is clearly taking in lots of information. His pale eyes cast over Derek's face and stance, flick to the vehicle he drove in, linger curiously on the bandaged animal in his arms.

"Derek Hale," he says with a small smile. He holds out a hand to be shaken, with which Derek automatically complies, shifting Stiles completely to his left arm. "I haven't seen you since..." he trails off compassionately, and Derek suddenly recalls the man, holding him tightly by one shoulder, reeking of smoke and death, telling him there was no one left, and did he have anywhere to go. That was ten years ago, and Derek is surprised to be recognized: he must have a phenomenal

memory, for Derek has changed a lot, from a gangly adolescent into a full-grown man. “I’m John Stilinski,” he adds, perhaps picking up on Derek’s confusion.

“I. Um. Good afternoon, sir,” Derek says awkwardly. “I. Didn’t expect you to be you.”

John looks at him quizzically, and Derek honest-to-god blushes, which he doesn’t think has happened in many years. He’s tense and nervous, and a lot of that is the pressure of meeting the father of his mate, of needing to make a good impression, to get permission and benediction for a courtship he knows he shouldn’t even be considering.

Gracefully letting the subject drop, John nods at the animal cuddled in Derek’s arm. “Did you find someone’s pet?” he asks.

Derek clears his throat. “No,” he replies. “He’s no one’s pet. It’s. Um. Can we talk inside, please? I don’t think you want to hear this out here.”

John’s eyebrows draw together, but he nods and steps back, holding the door open so that Derek can walk inside. There is no foyer, they just step straight into the living room, and John gestures Derek towards a rather sagging old sofa. Derek remains standing, however, and says, “If your wife is here, I think she’d like to hear this as well.”

John’s eyes narrow, and all expression slides off his face. He emanates mistrust, suddenly, making Derek stiffen. “My wife has been dead for some time, Mr. Hale,” he says coolly. “Now what is this about.”

Derek clenches his jaw against a surge of surprise and embarrassment. Shit. Now that he’s been told, he can remember something about the Sheriff being a widow. It had happened not long before his own family died, which might explain why he’d forgotten. He frowns and nods his head stiffly. “I’m sorry, sir,” he says, and then takes a deep breath.

He sits abruptly on the sofa and wearily indicates the armchair that smells the most strongly of the man before him. Leathery and musty, interwoven with the more recent camphorous sting of grief and guilt. “This is a difficult story to believe, sir. I think you might want to sit down.”

John slowly does, and his air of suspicion increases. “Just spit it out, then,” he commands.

Derek’s hackles rise a bit at the command from another Dom, but he ignores it and strokes his hand down Stiles’ back. “I was attacked and captured a week ago,” he says, and John jolts upright as though electrified, everything about him suddenly piercing and intense. “By four people known to my family as hunters. They’ve always had a problem with who we were, and this isn’t the first time we’ve been attacked by them.”

He can see John adding two and two and coming up with a ten-year-old fire that had killed 11 people. Derek nods in silent confirmation, and then pauses a moment to let that sink in.

“When I woke up, in the basement where they were keeping me. Um. There was someone else already there.”

John’s expression is heartrendingly open: hopeful and terrified. “Stiles?” he breathes.

Derek nods. “Yes. He. He’d been there for some time already, I think,” and John nods at that. Derek is sure he knows *exactly* how long Stiles has been missing.

There's no easy way to do this, and Derek's never been particularly good with words, so he just gracelessly blurts it out. He extends his hands a little, Stiles held carefully between them. "This is Stiles."

The Sheriff's face immediately contorts into fury, and he lurches up from his armchair. "I don't know what you're trying to do here, Mr. Hale," he hisses, but Stiles interrupts him, wiggling free from Derek's hands and trotting stiffly over to his father. He drops at his feet and rolls over onto his back, showing his belly and pawing at John's pant leg, patting a scuffed brown shoe.

John angrily moves his foot, and Stiles flinches excessively, rolling back over in a scrambling rush and skittering a short distance away. But then he lays himself down to show his belly again, imploring black eyes staring up at his dad.

John isn't moved, still heaving in shaky breaths and face red with fury. One hand rests at his hip, where his gun would be if he'd been wearing his uniform. "Get. Out," he says, low and mean. "Get *the fuck* out of my—"

Derek stands, hands held away from his body, lips parted to explain, to attempt to stop this train-wreck; but Stiles takes that moment to dart away, skimming down a short hallway into a little side room that is likely an office. John whirls to follow him, and Derek trails behind, wondering what Stiles is planning. He hopes it's something good, because this isn't going well at all, and he's unhappily gearing up to prevent John from hurting his son, if it becomes necessary.

Derek leans in the doorway, watching what unfolds. Stiles is on his back paws, braced on a small gun safe, looking back at John as if asking him to wait and watch. John does hesitate, surprisingly, so Stiles quickly uses one careful forepaw to tap out what must be the proper combination on the keypad. The safe clicks open, and Stiles struggles to pull the heavy door further ajar with his paw. He wiggles inside and works around some guns and boxes of ammo to a yellowed envelope in the back. John stares in paralyzed silence while Stiles delicately pulls it free with his sharp little teeth and carries it over to John's feet, where he drops it. He pats the envelope with a paw and looks up at the man beseechingly.

John slowly squats, and picks up the envelope, sliding free an old photograph. It's of a young woman in a hospital bed, with an enormous smile on her tired face, a tightly swaddled newborn held high against her chest. A recognizable John stands stooped beside her, with longer hair and a beard, glowing with pride.

John flips the photograph a couple of times in his fingers and then stares down at the animal who brought it to him.

"How did you know that combination?" he asks.

Stiles huffs, and gives every appearance of rolling his eyes. Next he darts to the stairs and attempts to climb them. Intense discomfort saturates the room, and Derek frowns, hands twitching with the urge to pick him up. "You might want to carry him up the stairs, sir," he quietly suggests. "He's been injured, and we shouldn't make it worse."

John looks over at Derek briefly. His eyes are wet and shining, expression dazed, breath choppy. He nods a little and then offers his hands to Stiles, who easily settles into his gentle grasp. It is the work of a moment before the little fox is released on the landing at the top of the stairs, and Stiles hurries down the hall to what is clearly the bedroom of an adolescent.

Derek coughs at the overwhelming smell of boy: sweat, dirty clothes, decomposing snack foods lost in corners, and plentiful evidence of enthusiastic and prolific masturbation. Even after two weeks the latter odor is unmistakable. Stiles casts a quick, guilty, embarrassed look over at Derek, obviously smelling it too, before assiduously ignoring the wolf.

Stiles walks over to the desk and then waits impatiently, nose pointed upward, clearly requesting a lift.

Bemused, John picks him up again, setting him on the surface of the desk. Stiles paws at a laptop, which John obligingly unfolds.

Carefully using a toenail, Stiles powers up the computer and then slowly types in the password when it's prompted. Derek and John silently watch as the screen comes to life. Unfortunately, and terribly awkwardly, the account opens on a paused video: a pale, slender sub is folded over the back of a sofa while a muscular dark-haired Dom with a well-maintained scruff appears to be hammering the fuck out of him from behind. The site proudly proclaims itself to be iGayTube.

Stiles jerks and does the small animal version of a full-body flail, falling over the keyboard in his rush to minimize the screen, panting with distress. Derek can hear his heartbeat skyrocket. Stiles makes a hash of the effort, nails getting caught between the keys and paw skidding ineffectively over the touchpad. Derek takes pity on him and reaches over to exit this intriguing (and unfortunately timed) insight into Stiles sexual fantasies, while John snorts with amusement, simply watching the show.

After a moment where no one really wants to look at another, John leans forward and taps on the Word icon, calling up a blank document. "Can you type?" he asks. Stiles seems miffed at this insult to his abilities and rapidly picks out

hji dad

itsx rlly me

logh story

asjk derejk

Stiles nods seriously, nosing at John's wrist. John obligingly strokes him some more, callused fingertips catching on the bandages around his neck, noting the roughness of other scabs hidden under his fur. Stiles begins to purr, and John stares for a moment in wonderment before reverently scooping him up, cradling him in his arms like something infinitely precious.

Derek swallows his jealousy, knowing he needs to give father and son time to reunite and reaffirm their connection. Hell, he may never get time to spend with Stiles again, and he wouldn't really blame the Sheriff if that's the choice he makes.

John nods towards the door. "Let's go to the kitchen and you can tell me what the hell is going on, hmm?" His tone towards Derek is markedly different than his attitude towards Stiles: he's less cold and distrustful than he was, but still projects a decisive reserve.

The sheriff grabs a bottle of whiskey en route and splashes a healthy amount into a glass before he sits at a small, scarred kitchen table. He lifts his brows at Derek indicating the bottle, but accepts it easily when Derek shakes his head. "Water?" he asks, and Derek declines again.

Derek sinks into the other chair and watches as John sets Stiles down on the table in front of him. Stiles wrinkles his nose at the whiskey, looking distinctly judgmental (which makes John smile a bit) but doesn't cease his quiet purring.

"All right then," John prompts.

Derek inhales and then blows it out slowly, centering himself. This part is foolhardy and dangerous, yet at the same time absolutely necessary. "I need to tell you something that is... very difficult to believe. And I need you to. Be calm about it, and keep an open mind, if you can."

John braces himself, straightening in his chair and squaring his shoulders, but he also has a rueful look. "More difficult to believe than that my son is suddenly a... a... some kind of small animal?" But Derek has his riveted and unbroken attention.

Stiles stops purring and fidgets, chewing nervously at a forepaw. He's curled into a tiny C near his father's elbow. Close enough to stretch out and touch him from time to time. Perhaps he can predict what Derek is about to do. He stands and clicks across the table to sit near Derek, offering his wordless support.

"It's related," Derek admits. And then he proceeds to explain about his family's unique gifts, their penchant for howling at the moon, the enemies this garnered them through no fault of their own. John remains quiet throughout, but his skepticism is deep and Derek doesn't think he's convinced the man.

"Werewolves are born, like myself and my family. But they can also be made. The bite of an Alpha can turn a human into a werewolf. And that's what," he stops to clear his throat and resists the impulse to wipe nonexistent sweat from his brow. "That's what happened to Stiles."

John's silent for a few minutes, staring pensively at his empty glass. Without looking back up, he snags the bottle and refreshes his drink, tossing it down in one gulp.

"You're an 'Alpha', then. ... Is that just werewolf for Dom?"

Derek shrugs. "Not really. Most of my family were Dom. My mother was the Alpha. When she and... everyone else... died, that position passed down to me."

"And you bit Stiles, so now he's a... werewolf; that's what you're saying."

Derek sighs. "I bit Stiles, yes. Which was more his decision than mine, to be honest. But he... isn't...." Derek trails off, and there's a long, awkward pause, wherein they both stare at Stiles, who is by no stretch of any imagination anything even faintly resembling a wolf.

"Son," John says to Derek at last, and there might be laughter hidden deep. "That's no wolf."

Derek shrugs and frowns, feeling inexplicably inadequate.

"What is he, then?" John asks with visible restraint.

Derek clears his throat. "Dr. Deaton says he's a fennec fox."

Stiles flickers one enormous ear in Derek's direction and the other towards his father. He smells vaguely of embarrassment.

John opens his mouth, pauses, and then just shakes his head.

“Can you give me any proof?” he asks at last.

Derek nods and taps his fingers restlessly on the table, making Stiles twitch. “If I shift into the wolf, I’ll have to take off my clothes first, or they’ll be ruined. Would you be convinced by a smaller change.”

John stares for a moment, and then shrugs. “I’d like to see the whole nine yards, if I can. It won’t bother me if it doesn’t bother you,” he says, evidently too intrigued to care about some wildly uncomfortable nudity between two near-strangers.

Derek nods and stands up, leaning over the sink to pull down the blinds over the window there. “We don’t want to ruin your reputation, sir,” he explains wryly, eyebrows commenting further without his conscious volition. John snorts in response, and then studiously keeps his face blank and his focus on Derek’s face while Derek quickly and efficiently strips down.

Between one breath and the next, Derek twists into his wolf form, smoothly torquing his body onto four legs, spine lengthening, femurs shrinking, hands and feet transforming into paws, the familiar weight of his tail sprouting heavily from the end of his spine. The world changes with him, losing color but gaining depth in the form of scent and sound.

John shoves his chair back and lunges to his feet, back against the wall and hand grasping for a gun that isn’t at his waist while he’s at home. His heartbeat crescendos, in time with the great gulps of air he pulls in. The lines on his face are stark in the kitchen light, and Stiles chuffs in concern.

Derek slowly wags his tail and sits down, fighting his Dom nature to present himself as nonthreatening. But even if he were grinning with his tongue lolling out (which he is in no way comfortable enough to do with this basically unknown man), he’s enormous and so clearly lethal that it’s hard not to perceive him as dangerous. The lizard hindbrain in *every* animal recognizes him as an apex predator.

Except for Stiles.

Of course.

Stiles stands up and walks to the edge of the kitchen table, looking straight at Derek and somehow Derek knows he’s laughing. Derek edges closer, doesn’t even have to stand to lift his nose and touch it to Stiles’ own. Stiles’ plump tail waves back and forth as well, and his purr deepens, becoming more audible.

Their little interaction seems to startle John out of his terrified paralysis. “*Jumping jesus christ on a pogo stick,*” he breathes, and passes a shaking hand across his face. “Unfuckingbelievable.”

Derek edges a little closer to Stiles, and licks delicately at his muzzle until Stiles returns the favor. John slowly comes closer until he can sink to his chair once more, staring avidly at both Derek and Stiles. His breath is shaky, but his scent is beginning to tint with curiosity as well as shock and fear.

Derek has a sudden, intense scent-stimulated memory of Stiles, sitting tailor-style in front of him in their bleak cell, eyes wide with curiosity and excitement, long-fingered hands tracing out Derek’s changing features, cool against skin unblemished from earlier torture. Derek had felt nearly helpless before this strange sub: had allowed him to poke at his teeth, stroke his eyebrows, shape

the curve of his ears and jaw, all the while leaking the slowly growing diffusion of patchouli-laced inquisitiveness, a clean anise of excitement, the sweet syrup of distant arousal. Derek had beta-shifted for him, even, spurred on by nothing more than a wide smile and brightly anticipatory eyes.

John smells the same, minus the arousal and with an additional dose of fear and shock. Derek instinctively relaxes, primitive, lupine part of him associating Stiles and his father for the first time.

John chews on the end of his thumb. “Derek. Er. Can you understand me like that?”

Derek looks at him calmly and nods his head, still planted solidly on his butt, unwilling to frighten the man further. There's another long pause, which Derek and Stiles spend nosing comfortably at one another as John processes. “So,” he says after a while. “You bit Stiles...” Derek indicates confirmation. “And he was supposed to turn out like you... a wolf?” Derek nods again, blinking slowly at the man as he works it out in his head. “But instead he... turned into this little fox creature?” This time it's Stiles who nods his head, and Derek mouths at the tip of one swiveling ear to give him some comfort and support. Also, because it's kind of funny, in a horrible, existential kind of way.

John pinches his bottom lip and blows out a long sigh, face contorting briefly into an unwilling smirk. “Stiles, you silly ass. This is not what a werewolf looks like.”

Stiles leans back in exaggerated and mock offense and lifts the corner of one lip in a sarcastic silent snarl. *See if you could do it better*, is his implied challenge.

John snorts with badly suppressed laughter and shakes his head. When he's settled down a little, he throws back the remainder of his whiskey and then stares into the empty glass with an expression of resigned bewilderment before thunking it down and saying to Derek, “Alright. Okay. Can you turn back?”

Derek does so, with no fuss, and quickly dresses himself once again as John politely looks a bit to his left.

“Stiles.” John's voice is firm. “I want you to turn back, too.”

The fennec fox on the kitchen table looks up at his father with luminous, damp-looking eyes and sighs, as close to a pitiable whine as he can get.

“He hasn't been able to,” Derek contributes. “Dr. Deaton said he thought it was just a reaction to trauma, and that he would when he was ready.”

“Deaton.” John states heavily. “*The vet*. Knows about werewolves and... the thing that Stiles is. Foxes. *Werefoxes*.” He presses his lips together as if he can't believe he just said that. “Jesus. What is my life?”

Derek says, “Deaton's been the Hale Pack emissary for my whole life.”

John doesn't ask what an emissary is; he's still focused on Stiles. “What if he can't turn back?”

Derek hides his hands behind his back and clenches his fists. “He will, sir,” he promises futilely. “I know he will. It'll just take a little time.”

John rubs his face roughly once again, and his eyelashes are damp when he finally draws his hand away.

“Alright,” he says, and his voice is a little small, a little lost. “Alright, then. Why don’t you tell me about the rest of it. Who captured you and why, and...” he stops and then touches the bandage around Stiles neck with a solicitous finger. “I saw some of it. A video of,” his voice breaks and he has to stop to suck in a steady breath. “I was sent a recording. A video of.” He presses his fist against his mouth and another tear escapes his control. “Stiles....” The word goes high pitched at the end, thin and wet and heartbroken.

Stiles scrabbles across the table to rush to his dad, standing on his back legs to brace against John’s chest, leaning up to lick frantically at his neck. His tail is clamped firmly around his legs, and sorrow and guilt flood the room as he offers what comfort he can. He tries to whine or yip or make any kind noise, but chokes on it, wheezing and gurgling until Derek lays a firm hand on his back.

“Stiles,” Derek says with authority. “You have to calm down.” He looks at John as well, whose eyes are flooded and reddened. “You too, sir. You’re upsetting him.”

John swallows hard and nods, sniffling once as he picks up the small furry form of his son and tucks it under his chin. “Right. Of course.”

Derek sits again in his chair and sighs. He blandly recounts their captivity (no one has to know that his claws pierce his jeans, the skin of his thighs, clenching with impotent rage); he treats it as a debrief with an officer of the law rather than an emotionally fraught account to a frightened father. John responds in kind, drawing the mantle of his responsibility over any traumatized reactions he might have. But they peek through, from time to time, when Derek describes how Stiles has never spoken in his hearing, the heart-rending torment of the brutal collar, the sheer bravery of the defenseless boy in such a dark and hopeless place.

Derek tells him about his own torture, as well as the accelerated healing which leaves him unmarked now, and about his and Deaton’s concern that Stiles isn’t healing as rapidly.

Something about John reminds Derek a lot of his mother, his Alpha: powerful and ruthless in defense of those she loved, calm in the face of an emergency and above all, to be trusted. It is because of this, perhaps, that Derek reveals more than he intended to, letting slip that Stiles was in sub-drop when they met, that Derek felt a kind of *duty* to him from the beginning. (But he certainly never uses the word ‘bond’, because he isn’t that stupid.) John’s eyes flash a bit at that, and he toys thoughtfully with Stiles’ fluffy tail, but the other details of the story are so egregious that it seems a small thing overall.

Derek does *not* tell John about the humiliation and degradation Stiles suffered at the hands of the hunters. Doesn’t tell him about the beatings and the Sharpie and the sexual assault. He’ll let Stiles tell him later, if he chooses. (And John saw the video. He must have a good idea of what had likely happened.)

But Derek does tell him, burning with intense pride, that it was *Stiles* who turned off the electrical current, who made it so Derek could free them both. Escape would never have happened without Stiles’ strength and determination. (Somewhat to Derek’s disappointment, John doesn’t seem to focus on that detail as much as Derek would like.)

When Derek finally wraps up, John is raring to go *do something* and he doesn’t seem to balk at the fact that he’s sure to stumble over two corpses when he finds the cabin.

"Um. My blood is all over the place, sir," Derek protests.

"What, is your DNA on file somewhere?" John asks.

"No. But I do not know if it will ping as entirely human," Derek says. "No one can find it. Please. For Stiles' safety as well as my own."

John purses his lips, considering, two fingers scratching his purring son between his enormous, flickering ears. "I'll go alone," he says finally. "Find the bastards and..." *go vigilante on their asses* is the unspoken finish to that statement.

Derek shakes his head. "There are at least two more of them, sir. And you have no idea what you're up against. They'll slaughter you, and no one would ever find your body. Please wait until tomorrow and you can go with me and my pack. I could maybe contact the Argents and-"

"Chris Argent? The weapons contractor?" John asks. "Is he a werewolf, too?"

Derek snorts. "Yeah, no. The Argents are hunters as well. But they've had a pact with my family for many years. I do not think they'd take well to other hunters in their town."

John rolls his eyes a little and shakes his head. "I can't *believe* all this shit," he mutters.



Chapter End Notes

Well, that went well, didn't it? ;D

I have a shameless quote from another fox!Stiles fic in this chapter. I wanted to use it SO BADLY, because it's hilarious; it was kind of hard to shoe-horn it in, but I think I managed (tell me if it's too jarring). Go read [**That Depends On How You Define Werewolf**](#) by [**janonny**](#), and you will find the quote. That story is so wonderful, and funny and just all kinds

of adorable and was definitely one of my inspirations for writing this. I should probably tell the author, huh?

If you're not in this for the adorable, then here's another fic rec: [**Fixer Upper**](#) by [**Arsenic**](#). I just found this and I'm kind of glad wasn't written back in January, or I might never have gotten off my lazy ass and started writing my own thing. It's all the trauma and angst and graphic Stiles!whump and captivity and torture and slow recovery that I'd been craving, only without the D/s, mute!Stiles, and Bite. And, *ahem*, much more succinct, at near 40k.

Aaand, if you need something light to cleanse your palate after the last rec, and want to laugh out loud in the peaceful silence of your home (or the bus, class, gym, whatever), then go read [**Shot Through The Heart**](#) by [**LunaCanisLupus_22**](#), which I miraculously came across while cruising the non-tag "Derek is a cat." Derek is NOT a cat in this story. He is an assassin. So is Stiles. I don't even know why I got sent there, but boyhowdy am I glad I did.

What Stiles Needs is a Good Drop

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dad and Derek are gone for most of the next few days. Stiles is left at home with last night's dinner in a dish on the floor and a water bowl. And, crowning indignity, a litter box. John was very firm about that: he absolutely would *not* leave a door unlocked, much less open, while he and Derek weren't there to protect Stiles.

Stiles is pretty miffed at their lack of confidence in his ability to protect himself, slowly healing injuries and being scarcely 8 inches off the ground notwithstanding. Although John leaves the television on, Stiles is bored and lonely (he won't admit to being scared). He can smell the cabin on them when they return: the mildew and the suffocating, carrion scent of Gunner and Rudy's bodies.

Derek and his dad are staking the place out, waiting for Baron and Laxmi to return, or maybe that third man, but the cabin appears abandoned, the two stooges slowly decomposing in the front hallway. On the fourth day, they torch it, coming home smelling of smoke (the bad kind, redolent of chemicals and burnt plastic), weariness and frustration.

Deaton had stopped by after a few days and checked him over, probing mercilessly at all Stiles' hurts. He'd asked about whether or not Stiles had shifted, and seemed a bit judgy at hearing John's somewhat bewildered negative. Stiles had narrowed his little white eyebrows at that. *Back off, Unknown Enigma Vet, and quit throwing shade on my choices.* Deaton had eventually pronounced, in his solemn, pompous way, that the bone in his muzzle seemed to be reknitted, although he couldn't know for sure without an x-ray, and that Stiles would change back when he was ready.

The bandages are off now, and although Stiles' neck is still naked and raw and red, it no longer seeps or bleeds. His other contusions and abrasions are generally healed, distinguished only by the bright pink, shiny new skin that covers them. Stiles still feels continual low-grade exhaustion, probably due to all the effort his body is putting into healing, but that's the worst of it.

Well, the worst of it is the death of his sense of security. Home doesn't feel like a safe space anymore, and Stiles doesn't really know what to do with that. He's still off his Adderall, since no one's considered giving it to a tiny fox... probably wisely... which contributes to his constant, underlying agitation. He gravitates to Derek whenever the man is in his home (twice a day, as he meets up with John in the morning and when they return in the night), and that is soothing: Derek's large hand wrapping around his ribs, or engulfing his head, holding him tight by a hard-muscled thigh. This is the only time Stiles feels himself relax, feels the hypervigilance relent, even a little.

Deaton had tutted over the torn skin and denuded forelegs, all self-inflicted, as he chews at himself trying to keep his frantic nerves from jumping right out of his skin.

Dad had noticed, of course he had, he'd petted and cuddled Stiles both in the morning with his coffee and then in the evening with his cholesterol-laden take out meals and Dog Cops on TV. Yesterday, he'd asked if Stiles needed dropping, (*Asked! On what planet does a sub want to be asked such a thing, Dad? The whole fucking point of dropping is being able to stop thinking about what you need*) and had given it a valiant attempt; but what worked on Stiles as a human didn't seem to work on him as a fox. (*I want you to kneel in the corner for fifteen minutes, Stiles, and no*

talking or you get popped, yeah, doesn't translate to tiny animal.) It'd been a frustrating and embarrassing episode, and both of them had awkwardly and hurriedly gone their separate ways afterwards, John into his study for a drink, and Stiles to the blanket on the sofa, so he could dig himself a tunnel behind the throw pillows and hide.

They don't really meet each other's eyes, after that. Not that they did much before. Stiles *wants* to, but his dad is always looking somewhere else, frowning and sad, and it seems like Stiles' animal presence makes him feel worse instead of better. Logically, of course, Stiles knows that isn't true. But also logically (because Stiles is *nothing* if not compulsively analytical), his perspective is utterly distorted right now, and logic has no place in it.

This doesn't stop Stiles from feeling rejected, inadequate and unfulfilled while also being contrarily viciously angry and resentful about it all. Coming home was supposed to make everything better, but instead it's almost worse.

Well, not really worse. Of course it isn't worse. But. He stewed alone with his thoughts all day. Derek is only around for maybe an hour total, and John has no idea how to interact with his son, both because of his form and because of his recent experiences. Neither Stilinski has ever been fluent in emotional speak, preferring to rely on physical cues and physical responses.

He's had occasional respite, little bright oases throughout the day. Being a fox can be *fun*, which he discovered a couple of days in. His body didn't hurt so unremittingly anymore, and bouncing is *amazing*. He can bound up the stairs, reach his bed, leap to his desk or dresser. He spent half an hour in front of the full length mirror in his dad's room, just jumping to see how high he could jump. Easily four feet, which is *six times his body height*, thank you very much. Ha. Tigger in fox form, that's what he is. (Tiggers don't jump; they bounce.)

Stiles had a rubber fidget ball that had gotten lost under his bed. But under his bed is like a warehouse, now, vast and dark, and he finds the old ball while exploring and then loses a quarter of an hour bounding around it, flicking it into the air or walls and ricocheting after it, pouncing on it, chasing it down the hallway, holding it between his paws and teeth, prey.

There's a small collection of Dad's shoes growing next to the sofa, where Stiles has dragged them for chewing. He doesn't know why: he's hardly aware of doing it. They smell like Dad, and they're sturdily resilient, and they feel good between his teeth, squeaky and satisfying. They're also longer than his body, so he has to walk with his legs splayed, so the shoe can drag under his belly on the long trek between Dad's closet and the living room. But he doesn't let that stop him. (He's pretty sure his dad filmed him doing this on his phone, while Stiles wasn't paying attention, snickering behind his hand until Stiles had finally looked up. He makes a note to go through his dad's phone and erase it later, when he can.)

Then there was the one time with the cockroach. Stiles' fabulous, analytical brain evidently slipped into troglodyte mode and didn't come back online until he was joyfully crunching away at an insect carapace. The less said about that, the better, and Stiles will deny to his dying day that he ever burped up a roach leg.

When he's in the right frame of mind, usually after breakfast (which is always something very soft, like scrambled eggs) and a last snuggle from his dad and soothing sweep from Derek before they go Hunter-hunting for the day, he likes to experiment with his other senses. Immersing himself in his animal brain is kind of awesome. He can hear *all* the neighbors, if he tries, from the cartoons that the de Silva girl watches (Stiles gets a SpongeBob theme song earworm for half a day, which

makes him *insane*), to the hissed arguments between her parents. He can hear old Mrs. Jaworski muttering softly to herself in Polish about the baranina in the oven (and that's five houses down). He can hear the clatter of the keyboard and stentorous breathing from across the street as Mr. Patel does... whatever his little web business is.

Stiles' sense of smell is nearly as outrageous as his hearing. He knows when the garbage truck is entering their neighborhood, sniffs out a lost thumb drive behind the washing machine that smells strongly of school, is able to suss out what his dad ate during the day and didn't tell him about. And once, truly horrifyingly, he accidentally tracks down wadded up, come-filled tissues in his dad's room. *Oh, god, no, no, no, Dad!!!* The death of innocence is such a painful thing, truly.

But overall, these (mostly) lighthearted moments are fleeting. And then Stiles will settle down, bored out of his mind, in spite of the TV (daytime television will never not suck... and he very much regrets that they'd *cut the cord, Dad*). Shitting in the litter box never fails to make him humiliated and angry, so really, it just comes down to the first dump of the day (which is nowhere near predictable, as his digestive system tries to re-acclimate to actual regular meals), and *boom*, he's back to wallowing. Anything to do with his asshole, really, leads him straight down a path to things he'd rather not think about, which means he hides in his animal brain and chews fretfully at his paws.

He's afraid to change back. The last time he was human was so traumatizing, he simply can't risk facing it again. While fear is an emotion he can certainly feel wholesale as a fox, the shame and revulsion towards what was done to him in captivity is blunted, less important somehow, and he vaguely understands that those feelings will fall full-force upon him if he shifts back. So in spite of the daily pleas and commands from both Derek and his father, he hides behind his fur, silent and skittish.

After Derek and John burn down the hunters' cabin, Stiles spends a couple of days without a single Derek-sighting... and he can hardly *breathe*, he's so wound up. His father has gone back to work, and Stiles can't sleep, keeps jumping up and patrolling his home, toenails clicking and slipping on hardwood and linoleum, listening to every sound outside, the heartbeat of his father as he sleeps, the gentle hum of electricity in the wires.

There are three clocks in the house that tick out the seconds, and none of them are synchronized; the continual barrage of *tick, tick, tick*, edges Stiles closer and closer to an explosion of manic rage. He spends some time leaping at the clock on the kitchen wall, but even he can't jump that high. His anger and agitation and fear combine to sit like hot lead in his belly, until he feels literally sick with it, dizzy and shaking. He wants to *scream*, but knows he can't, that the ragged burst of air that will come out of him when he tries will only underline how broken he is, so he keeps his jaw clamped shut.

His heart pounds a mantra of *not safe, not safe* and *weak*, and *abandoned*. So Stiles nurses his anger, because it's the safest emotion out of the maelstrom in his gut. He needs a tether. Needs something to rein him in, to clamp him down, to put out this fire, searing like acid in his blood. He's been home for six days, and he's flying apart under his skin, in jagged, cutting shards, bright-edged and coated in a fine poison of fury.

When Derek finally returns, after two full days away without explanation, exhaustion and sheer emotional strain has Stiles staggering, thoughts tangled in dark, convoluted snarls, and breath catching short.

Two. Days.

Dad is at work, has been gone for four hours, and Stiles is so jumpy that he can hear Derek's car, Derek's heartbeat, from five minutes out. He rushes to the door and stands, waiting, vibrating, listening to the car door open and close, to the squeak of leather and Derek's sigh as he lifts himself out of his seat. The werewolf heads first for the front porch, then aborts and detours around to the back. Stiles assumes that means he remembered that the door would be locked. He hops upstairs and trots down the hall to his bedroom, hears Derek jump and swing himself up on the roof, hears the serrated stutter of the window as the swollen wooden sash grinds open.

When Derek slips into his room, Stiles is waiting on the rug in front of his bed, tiny body shaking with wrath. How dare he? *How dare he* leave for so long. As if Stiles isn't important. As if he no longer matters, now that he's been shoved back at his dad. As if he were nothing more than a burden, all along. Because Stiles refuses to believe their week in the cell was simply a *duty*. Can't. Can't believe it.

When Stiles' lips curl back, the growl he emits isn't silent, which startles him so much he sits on his haunches, ears folding down, choking on the noise.

Derek is wearing a white T-shirt under an open leather jacket, and his jeans are ridiculously tight. He stands still, eyebrows conveying surprise, consideration and a determined assessment as he watches Stiles growl. He keeps his hands by his sides, but his eyes flash red and stay that way.

"*Stiles!*" Derek admonishes, short and sharp, and Stiles immediately quiets, tilting his head down and to the side, neck bared before he can stop himself. He feels the familiar tug of need to lie down and present his belly, is rolling onto his back before he knows he's doing it. But he leaps back to his feet as soon as he realizes what's going on, moving slowly backwards, head still tilted differentially. *I don't belong to you, you... you... abandoning dickwad!*

"*Sit down!*" Derek commands, and Stiles does.

When Derek first enters Stiles' room, the fox is furious and hurt, the clinging diesel scent of it pervading the room, thick and urgent. His lifted lip showcases tiny, extremely sharp teeth, and the growl that he emits is loud enough to startle both of them, accustomed as they are to Stiles' silence.

However, the Dominant wolf in Derek is not at all impressed with this defiant, angry sub. Not at all. "*Stiles!*" he snaps, and Stiles skitters backward before tilting his head away, baring his neck to his Alpha, flopping ungracefully to his back to show his belly. He goes through his now-familiar and very uncomfortable submissive routine: exposing his soft stomach but then rolling over and leaping mistrustfully back to his feet, dancing away before his need to submit has him going through the pattern once again.

It sets Derek's teeth on edge, filling him with the bitter awareness that while Stiles may be submitting, he still doesn't trust Derek enough to remain vulnerable. The edge of Stiles' anger is acidic in his nose, and under that, Derek discerns a wild desperation that he slowly realizes is Stiles trying fruitlessly to keep himself under control.

Oh.

“*Sit down,*” he commands, and Stiles does immediately, a cool note of relief entering the discordant jumble of scent.

If Stiles seems calmer through having orders to follow, Derek is surprised to realize that he feels more settled as well, in the giving of them. He takes a deep breath and wonders if the Sheriff has dropped Stiles yet; wonders if he’s even tried. They stare at each other for an extended, breathless moment.

When Derek considers Stiles’ apparent agitation in light of a submissive’s needs, it suddenly makes sense that being given an order would bring some surcease from the visible chaos in his mind. As a sub, Stiles probably requires the relief of dominance just in the course of his everyday life, to say nothing of the new and unique needs that might have been engendered by his recently escaped ordeal. Derek recalls that Stiles’ father had mentioned ADHD, and wonders how that factors into the need to drop. And what is the result when compounded by extended physical and emotional trauma?

A big, fat, psychological mess, no doubt.

John is on shift, and Derek knows he’ll be gone for hours yet. It is one of the reasons he’s currently in the Sheriff’s house, because he’d been asked to drop by and check on Stiles if he could. Derek knows it bothers John to have to treat his son like a pet, leaving him alone in the house with food and water and a litter box. But, for obvious reasons, there is no one the Sheriff feels he can confide in except for Derek.

“*Lie down,*” Derek tells Stiles, in a firm tone, but not Alpha command. “*Legs out front, nose down.*”

A shiver runs through Stiles’ tiny body, pale fur rippling in a wave from head to tail. Sharply angled black eyes blink slowly at him, and this time the cucumber scent of relief is unmistakable. Stiles stretches a little, saucy thing, before lowering himself, resting his nose on his outstretched legs. His ears are attentive, pointed at Derek, and his absurdly long black whiskers tremble.

“*Very good, Stiles,*” Derek says softly. “*Very nice. I like how you listened to me right away.*” He sinks slowly to his knees before reaching out to sweep his hand across Stiles’ narrow skull, tugging his sail-like ears backward before letting them spring upright again. “*I’m going to take care of you now. I’m going to give you what you need.*”

Stiles’ tail wags back and forth a few times, dragging against the fibers of the carpet, and his left ear flicks outward, telling Derek to proceed.

“*Good,*” Derek says. “*I’m going to get some things. I want you to wait right here. Don’t move. Close your eyes and relax.*”

Stiles’ muzzle crinkles adorably, as if he wants to express his doubts about being able to relax. But his eyes close, and Derek watches as he exhales, long and slow.

Derek unfolds himself to standing in a single motion, and then moves to the kitchen, grabbing various snacks and a bottle of water out of the fridge. In the bathroom upstairs he finds a brush and comb and a clean fluffy towel. When he enters Stiles’ bedroom again, he shuts the door behind him and pushes the little button that locks it. Stiles’ ears twitch at the *snick*, but he doesn’t open his

eyes, and Derek rumbles in approval. He locks the window and twists shut the blinds, and nearly smiles, satisfied that he and his sub are safely cocooned.

After dropping his handful of items at the foot of the bed, he kneels next to Stiles and gently grabs his snout. “Look at me, Stiles.” Stiles does, with a faint air of irritation, and Derek suppresses a smirk. “Growl for me?” The paler markings above his eyes scrunch down in a very real approximation of confused eyebrows, but Stiles obediently inhales and surprises himself again with a short, high-pitched growl. Derek snorts a little at the sound, and Stiles’ eyes narrow as he growls again, more seriously this time. *Make fun of me this time around and see how I can bite you.*

Derek outright laughs. “Alright, Mr. Danger,” he says. “That’s enough.”

He strokes over Stiles from his nape to the tip of his tail. “You will growl at me if you don’t like something I’m doing. Anything. That will be your safeword, for now.” He sighs. “I’ve been doing this all wrong, and I’m sorry.” Stiles twitches under his hand and starts purring determinedly, which makes Derek smile again. “Although it’s true we were in a pretty unique situation.” He scoops Stiles into his hands and transfers him to his bed, curled near the pillows. He kneels on the floor and rests his elbows on the mattress, watching Stiles seriously. “I’m going to drop you tonight, Stiles. I think you need it, and I do, too.” He waits for a growl, but none is forthcoming. Stiles does glance curiously at the pile of accoutrements that Derek has gathered, though, and his tail wags for a few beats.

“We’ll start with you in this form,” Derek says sternly. “But I want you shifted by the time we’re through. I’ll have you kneeling at my feet, Stiles, do you understand.” There’s a short, sharp inhale, and then a very scratchy whine, but Derek holds his gaze until Stiles drops it, head back on his outstretched legs. Derek will take that as a yes. “Good,” he says. “Let’s begin.”

When he sits on the bed, Stiles tumbles towards him as the mattress dips, so Derek scoops him up and puts him in his lap, belly up and spine settled along the seam of his legs. “Close your eyes,” he whispers, and Stiles does, going pliant and giving himself over to his Dom.

Derek can feel Stiles’ surrender thrum through his own veins, lighting the core of the bond between them and firing him with the need to control and protect. He feels as if he becomes bigger, stronger and more confident in response. He cups his hands around Stiles, “Just relax and let me take care of you.”

He gets lost, then, in stroking Stiles, soft fur warm and silky between his fingers. Stiles vibrates with his gentle purr, head flung back in careless abandon, abused neck stretched out, exposed and so very frangible. Trusting. Derek rubs over every inch of Stiles in his canid body, delicately pulling at whiskers and ears, smoothing over muzzle and lip, palm spread warm and heavy across Stiles’ vulnerable stomach. Derek switches to the brush and comb, dragging them through fur until it’s shed all it will, a puffy wad of white that Derek plucks from the brush to set on the nightstand. Derek flips Stiles over to his stomach, works on the slightly darker fur across his shoulders and back, spends ages on his wildly poofy tail.

And Stiles just lets him, purring and entirely limp, yielding to every position Derek places him in. Derek can still feel the healing scars hidden under his fur, and disturbs Stiles long enough to rise and shed his clothing before shifting to wolf and jumping lightly to the bed. Stiles rolls towards him again, eyes flashing open in startlement, but Derek just rumbles a warning and pins him down with one enormous paw. Stiles submits once more, and Derek begins to groom him with his tongue, bathing his narrow little face with wide, soft strokes. He laves along Stiles’ eyes and ears,

lapping at his muzzle to clear any remnants of the day's meals, lingering there to appreciate Stiles' unique flavor, scenting past the glands at the corners of his mouth that make him smell so irresistible.

Derek visits all Stiles' scent glands, nosing over his malleable little body: those in the canthi of his eyes, behind his ears, on his back before the start of his tail, the one at the very tip of his tail (which Derek mock chews for a while, just to make Stiles twitch and mumble, and the smell of him blooms suddenly, heavy in the small room). Each paw has glands between each toe, and Derek licks patiently at all of them, holding Stiles down, as the tiny fox wiggles from tickles. The anal gland, the most intense, he saves for last, after all the other grooming is done.

Stiles squirms when Derek begins there, letting out a startled little yelp: but it's not a growl, so Derek doesn't stop. Here, in the puckered skin hidden below the base of his tail, Stiles tastes like something sweet and heavy. Derek can't describe it: salted tapioca or mincemeat pie, maybe. He holds Stiles down on his back, rear legs kicking uselessly, while he savors and licks, setting his sub to rights. Arousal begins to float sweetly in the air, and Derek grunts in satisfaction. He opens weighted eyes to see that Stiles' penis is beginning to emerge from its furry sheath, red and glossy. Derek impulsively swipes across that as well, hot and tart under his tongue.

Stiles simply pants.

Derek shifts back to human, the grind and pop of muscle and bone loud in the silent room. The cool air feels good on his suddenly bare skin, and he rolls his shoulders, cricking his head from side to side, settling into the new form. His hand remains on Stiles, holding the pup down and locking eyes. "Your turn," he says firmly. "You shift, Stiles... now... and I'll finish what I started." He lifts an eyebrow, lets it say what it will.

Stiles whines, a more robust sound than his first effort, and wiggles to escape from Derek's hand, but he just presses a little harder. "I'm not *nearly* done with you," he murmurs, can feel his eyes glowing red. He focuses inwards for a moment, seeks out the buzzing bond between them, fueling it with arousal and anticipation. "But you must be in your human form, Stiles."

"Remember what I said. *Stretch into it.* Feel your fingers and your toes, your long arms and your human stride." He smooths his hands down Stiles' soft belly. "Remember your skin smooth and bare, your blunt teeth, the muscles you use when you stroke your cock."

Stiles shivers again, and the air is redolent with a confusing mixture of lust and trepidation. "You can do it, Stiles. Show me you can, how good you are. Show me how good you can be." Derek thinks, too late, that it's risky, equating Stiles' ability to shift with 'good'; because the corollary, of course, is that if he *doesn't* shift then he must therefore be 'bad', which certainly won't help the boy's present, unanchored state.

But it turns out to be moot. Stiles twists and stretches under his palm, and gives a breathy groan as his form contorts and elongates, growing suddenly much bigger, fur vanishing to be replaced by rangy limbs and sleek, taut skin. When Stiles finishes, gasping and a little wild-eyed, Derek keeps his hand where it was, low on Stiles' abdomen.

It feels like the first time Derek's actually seen the boy; free of clothes, of blood and dirt; free of the darkness and fear that pervaded the basement in which they'd been imprisoned.

He is beautiful.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter isn't as much of a mess as I think it is. I added about 1500 words today, then thought it was too long, and cut the thing in half, and basically stared at it until my eyes crossed and I started yawning uncontrollably (I always feel the urge for a nap when I'm stressed.) Domachenkov hasn't looked it over since I scrambled it, obviously, so if you see any glaring errors or disjointed sentences or whathaveyou, lemme know. Now I'm off to drink some wine....

...and the Sexin'

Chapter Notes

Heh, chapter title says it all. This one ends on a bit of a cliffie, just, fair warning.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He lies stretched on the bed, slender and delicate; clean, after Derek's meticulous grooming, smelling comfortably of nothing more than Derek and himself. Derek skates his hand up, over the ladder of Stiles' ribs and curls it around the bony knob of a surprisingly broad shoulder. Stiles' eyes are dark in the dimmed light of the room, fixed apprehensively on Derek's own, which he flashes reassuringly. Stiles blinks, and in response, his eyes flare, luminous and inky, the glow vanishing with the next blink. Derek doesn't think Stiles even knows he did it.

The only plump curves that Stiles possesses at the moment are his lips, the bottom of which he's drawn in between his teeth. He swallows, and it is loud in the silence. Derek notes the jolting bob of his Adam's apple. He narrows his eyes at the shiny pink skin and fading bruises that mark where the collar had excoriated his neck. Derek slides his hand thoughtfully across Stiles' sharp clavicle and deliberately up his offered throat until his hand rings over the mark of the collar.

"I want you to imagine that you are wearing my collar, Stiles," he says quietly, holding the boy's gaze. He tightens his fingers slightly, and then runs them just under the line of healing skin. "For right now, you are *my sub*, you yield to *my will*, do you understand?"

The rapid bob against Derek's palm denoted another gulp, and Stiles nods slowly, pupils dilating further.

"Do you object?" Derek asks, just to be sure. Stiles shakes his head, and Derek smiles. "Good boy."

Stiles' lip pops free of his teeth, and a pink tongue darts out to wet it, leaving a faint shine behind. Derek finds himself unable to deny the need to touch Stiles everywhere in this form as well as the other. He explores with his hands, friction releasing heat to turn milky skin pink as he goes. Neck and face and ears, swooping over the sub's skull, drawing thumbs across tissue-thin eyelids to momentarily blind him. The sharp ridge of cheekbones with faint and patchy scruff below them, the pad of Derek's thumb on a perfectly bowed mouth, tracing the ring of it, the tongue inside following his path, dancing along the blunt edges of white teeth.

Stiles maintains his silence, and Derek doesn't want to press him now to see if he can speak. He just continues his captivated journey. Stiles is the definition of rangy, the muscles of his upper arms long and lean, even though they're visibly diminished with the extreme and callus privations of his incarceration. When Derek circles his wrists, though, they are solid and strong, in spite of the green and yellow bruises around them. Stiles' fingers are slender and exotically long, as though he were meant to be a musician or an artist.

Stiles' brow furrows and his hands twitch when Derek lingers at his fingers, as if he isn't sure whether or not Derek is trying to hold hands.

"Stay still and relax," Derek orders gently. "Do nothing."

Stiles takes a deep breath and releases it slowly before nodding once again. His eyes are bright, and jerk between Derek's face and his upper body. Derek smirks and goes back to his exploration, letting Stiles stare his fill.

The boy is scattered with moles, small and dark, embellishing cheek and neck, below an ear, under one wrist. When Derek lifts Stiles' arms to fold them above his head on the pillow, he cannot stop himself from leaning down to nuzzle one particularly perky little mole hidden in the soft hair of his armpit, causing Stiles to twitch and huff. Derek lingers for a self-indulgent moment, breathing in the piquant scent of his new packmate. Of his *mate*. And when he tastes him it is a blended flavor of *Derek and Stiles* that he gets, musky and tart.

The flat, lean planes of Stiles' chest are next, temptingly smooth, scant hair along his sternum, around his nipples. Derek can open his hands, fingers spread wide, and fully cover sinewed pectorals. Stiles gasps when Derek rests his palms on small brown nipples, already peaked under his touch. Derek doesn't choose favorites, just rubs the boy gently in long sweeping strokes, from his hips to his shoulders, pressing against firm skin, ignoring, for the moment, the strained prominence of rib and hip, the soft hues of healing bruises: unpleasantly lingering reminders of Stiles recent tribulations.

Derek shifts, scooting further down, and Stiles makes his first sound as a human, a tiny, breathily voiced moan. Derek's eyes flash upwards and he smiles. "Good boy," he croons, hands around Stiles' hips, fingers in the dent of his gluteus, thumbs stretched toward his groin as he continues his long sweeps. "You're being so good. Lying so still for me, just like I asked."

Stiles' cock is filling, plump and long on the seam between his thighs. Ah, another, a *new* plump thing about Stiles, and Derek smiles again, dirtier this time. His register drops, becomes gravelly when he says, "You feel good, don't you, baby? Feel good with my hands on you." Stiles mouth is parted into an obscene '*O*', and his cock twitches as it begins to shift up his belly. "You *need* my hands on you. *Mmm*. Need me to take what you give."

He strokes down both thighs, infinitely long femurs covered with ropey muscle and fair skin, a dusting of dark, crinkly hairs that grows thicker towards the knee. On the return journey, Derek rolls inward with his thumbs, hands pressing out on each inner thigh until Stiles' must shift to part them. He makes another small sound, a hoarse, rusty kind of grunt, and Derek finds himself fiercely staring at him, coveting the noises he can make.

"That's a pretty sound, baby boy," he says finally. Carefully. Not sure what might be encouragement and what might be too much pressure. His urges as a Dom are all about conquering, yes, about mounting and fucking and *taking*. But they equally encompass nurturing, caretaking. And there's *so much* comfort and care that this sub patently requires. Feeding him until his narrow hip bones aren't sharp enough to cut. Hearing him talk and laugh, as he must have before. Ridding him of the faint tremor that shakes him periodically, the rising scent of fear in quiet moments when his eyes grow distant. These things were just as obvious when he wore fur as when he wears his human skin.

Derek's drive, surpassing even sex, is to put himself between Stiles and the world, until he is soft and happy. There's a framed photograph on his desk of himself and another boy, both bright and

laughing, arms thrown casually around the other's neck, and Derek wants to see that careless luminescence for himself, to feel that enthusiasm and joy.

Instead of lunging up and kissing more little peeps and hums out of Stiles' mouth, though, Derek follows lightly furred shins with his hands, taps on the bony protuberance of ankles, traces tendons down narrow feet and curls his warm fingers around cool toes. He lifts one foot and is pleased that Stiles remains limp, neither resisting nor helping him as he moves his body. "Very good," Derek breathes again. "I like how relaxed you are. How you hand yourself to me. Trust me." He rubs the scruff on his cheek against the foot in his hand, and Stiles smiles a little dopily, eyes getting the glazed look that means a sub is dropping down.

Derek turns his head enough to close his lips around two of Stiles' toes, teasing with his tongue, running teeth across their bottoms. Stiles makes a little *eep*, and Derek rewards him with another moment of long, slow suckling, reveling in the increased panting from his sub, the rise of a delicate flush across his face. Stiles' eyes, nearly as liquid and black as in his other form, are fixed on Derek's face, soft and dazzled. When Derek places the foot he cradles back on the bed, he makes sure there's room for himself to scoot up between the boy's thighs.

Thus far, Derek had been more or less unaware of his own nudity. As a werewolf, he shifts back and forth too often to be fussed about which form he wears, whether it's dressed in fur or cotton. But now kneeling between Stiles' naked legs, fervidly considering the red-flushed erection framed by a stretch of smooth ivory that grows gradually rosier as it approaches Stiles' face, he is abruptly recalled from his avid perusal to his own physical responses. Derek buzzes with energy, his very skin feels swollen with warmth and strength. The hairs on his body lift out as though running with a vitalizing current, and his groin tingles with rushing blood and anticipation.

Derek can feel the mating bond inside as if it's resonating with reflected sensations of his cock: both are heavy, turgid with heat and power, thrumming with zeal. The sliding sensation as his penis grows full enough to allow the head to poke through the protective collar of his foreskin makes him shudder, and an involuntary growl fills the air.

In contrast, Stiles is languid. His eyes are enormous as he stares down his body at Derek.

Stiles reacts unconsciously, rolling his head a little to one side, so that Derek can't stop himself from lunging forward on his knees to bite softly at the raised ridge of the sternomastoid muscle, nipping from ear to clavicle. Stiles shudders then, with a breathy *Ah*, and he tugs his hands free to grab Derek's shoulders, fingers cool against his overheated skin, clutching at him. Stiles doesn't pull him closer so much as he lifts his own body, to press it flush against his Dom's. Derek approves, pushing down further, teeth and tongue gliding over Stiles' neck, tipping his head to finish with a sharp nip at the hinge of his jaw.

Derek's hips are working of their own volition, rocking his cock through the bristling hairs that surround Stiles' own, and he groans at the electric abrasion of it. Stiles lifts his head to bury it in the curve of Derek's shoulder, fingers clawed into his biceps. The scent of *want* rising from the space between them is intoxicating, succulent. Derek groans as he finds a rhythm, pushing Stiles' hips down with one hand so that he can control the speed and the pressure. Stiles passively allows it, but doesn't release the bow of his body that hides his face, or the kneading clench of his hands around Derek's arms.

"m gonna get you off," Derek mutters into Stiles' hair. "Gonna take care of you, sweet boy."

Stiles shivers at that, a full-body frisson that leaves a fleeting wake of horripilation across his flanks and arms. "Make some noise for me, baby," Derek commands as he stops rutting and moves downward. "Let me know if it feels good."

Stiles whines a little as Derek draws away, and he smirks, eyebrows scrunching in pleasure before relaxing again. "That's a good start," he says, kissing and nibbling his way down Stiles' chest and belly, pausing to suckle small, beaded nipples on the way. Stiles gives a coughing groan and his fingers tighten, pushing himself at Derek's mouth while he shakes and pants. He slides one calf over Derek's leg, twining himself closer, digging his toes into the back of Derek's knee as Derek obligingly sucks at his chest.

When Derek reaches Stiles' cock, he hovers there, teasing, breathing hot gusts over the head. He finds Stiles' hands and traps them against the bed, on either side of his hips. He holds on tightly, though not cruelly, and can feel the instantaneous relaxation of Stiles' body in response to being bound. Bound and safe. Derek moves to plant his forearms across Stiles' thighs as well, pinning the sub down at four points.

Derek mutters nonsense in a cooing tone as he rubs the scent glands at the corner of his mouth up one side of Stiles' cock and down the other, applying steady pressure at wrist and thigh, not hard enough to bruise. When he finally sucks Stiles into his mouth, the boy's groan sounds like a rusty latticework looks, his voice coming and going as it stretches on and on. Derek hums a response around his mouthful, circles a thumb against the fragile bone of Stiles' wrist, and begins a slow rhythm, down and back up, swallowing all he can, the bond between them vibrating with his possessive intent and Stiles' ingenuous submission.

The room seems to get warmer and darker around them, closing in to make their own little cocoon. Stiles writhes as much as he's able, and Derek *savors* the taste of him, the sleek mucilagenous brine of precome, scented with musk and arousal. The wet slide of hot skin between his lips. The tension that shakes the body he holds captured under his weight and authoritative intent.

Derek groans and works harder, sucking Stiles down as though his subconscious is ignorant of the fact that he cannot *literally* eat the boy. He is flying as high on his dominance now as Stiles is on his submission, the sex hormones making both of them base, uninhibited and greedy. Stiles larynx has relaxed enough to allow the continual emergence of soft gasps and groans, no actual words, only small sounds that make Derek growl in visceral response, flooded with power, energy and strength at the sound of his mate's satisfaction.

He doesn't release Stiles, doesn't use his hands at all on the boy's cock, only his mouth, his lips and tongue and occasionally the delicate scrape of teeth just at the corona. He moves faster as Stiles' breaths grow choppy and his body tenses and shakes. The rusty sound the boy makes when he begins to come is grated and gravelly and makes Derek shiver until his skin is so sensitive that the hairs of Stiles legs against his ribs feel like a wire brush.

Derek drinks him down, each pulse of come held for a moment in his mouth, sliding *bitterandsalt* across his tongue before he swallows it away. He suckles gently until Stiles' aftershocks begin to die down. He lifts his head slowly, letting Stiles slip free inch by inch until his cock slumps against his hip, softened and sticky. Derek presses his nose to the tender skin there and lifts his elbows, letting up on the pressure across Stiles' thighs, unclamps his fingers to rub at the wrists he'd held down. Stiles sighs, and Derek goes to the fuzzy place where they *both* need aftercare in order to settle.

He moves to stretch full length beside his mate, turning him so that they're on their sides, facing each other. He holds the reddened wrists in his hands, massaging away any discomfort he may have caused. "Are you okay?" he asks softly. Stiles blinks dazedly at him and then gives a rather stoned and crooked twitch of a smile. He nods.

"Good." Derek replies, finishing his efforts with Stiles' wrists. He pulls the boy into his arms, holding him tightly against his chest, pressed from shoulder to toe, and strokes the long, sweet curve of Stiles' back as the boy burrows into him. He rumbles, *mmmm*, and rubs his cheek against Stiles' temple and hair, mouths for a distracted moment at his ear.

Stiles is boneless against him. Derek listens to the slowing beat of his heart, breathes in the gingery musk of his satiation, presses his lips against Stiles' temple to steal a taste of cooling sweat.

Derek himself still reverberates with unassuaged tension; caught between their bodies, his cock throbs in echo of his heart. But he puts his need aside. At present, he is engrossed in Stiles: how he feels, what he might be thinking, whether this was as good for him as Derek had hoped.

Derek's primary goal, as soon as he'd entered the window and been buffeted by Stiles' frustration and agitation, by his blindly flailing fury and desperation, had been to settle the boy, to calm him down, to provide him with the safe space he so manifestly craved.

Listening to the slowed metronome of his heart, the hum of him against Derek's chest, Derek can relax a bit, tell himself that he succeeded. He cups his hand around the back of Stiles' head, spanning it from just behind one ear to the other. The bristles of hair tickling his palm are damp and warm, and Derek smiles as he pushes his nose a little closer. Here, at Stiles' scalp, he smells most like he does in his animal form, no doubt because human hair is not far removed from an animal's fur.

Taking a stab at the cause of Stiles' initial anger, he whispers, "I'm sorry I haven't been here in a while."

Stiles stirs, just enough to indicate that he's listening, but keeps his face buried under Derek's chin.

"I had to take care of my pack—" he stops himself before he fucks up, "-the *other* members of my pack. They've been a mess since I was gone, and there's been so much I had to... patch up and pull together." He scratches his fingers in the fuzzy dent at the base of Stiles' skull, *scritch, scritch, scritch*. "And your father said he wanted some time alone with you. I. I couldn't just say No."

One of Stiles' hands creeps up his side, wraps around to clutch at the back of his shoulder, pinching punishingly, yet simultaneously pulling him closer. Mixed messages. Stiles huffs, and Derek hears the delicate click of grinding teeth. Derek waits to see if Stiles will respond further, but he just settles again, opens his mouth against the hollow of Derek's throat, tasting him with a tentative tongue.

Derek shudders and rearranges his grip, lower arm firmly embracing Stiles' shoulders, upper arm dragging, fingers spread, along Stiles' spine: a long, gently curving journey, down and up again to his nape, down and up.

He curves his hand around the pert swell of Stiles' ass and smiles to himself as he documents yet one more place where Stiles is plump, even after two weeks of starvation. Which brings him to the remainder of his plan for the evening.

"Not done with you yet," he mumbles, and twists to sit upright, pulling Stiles to follow suit. Stiles blinks at him sleepily, radiating satiation and contentment, and Derek can't help but sit straighter, all but puffing out his chest in pride that he's so successfully dropped his mate. He thumbs across Stiles bottom lip. "I said I'd have you kneeling for me," he begins, before turning to find the bathroom towel knocked to the floor, along with the little snacks and water bottle. He shakes out the towel and folds it into fourths, making a pad on the carpet next to the bed. "Kneel, Stiles."

After a brief, almost calculating pause, Stiles hums his acquiescence to the order. He awkwardly slides off the bed and folds himself into a loose kneel on the towel, resting on his heels next to Derek's leg. Derek can feel his eyebrows twitching a brief semaphore of pleasure before he leans forward. He scoops Stiles arms from where they rest in his lap and gently urges Stiles to put them behind his back. "I'll be your hands," he murmurs. Stiles nods a little, and glances back down at his lap. Derek touches a fingertip to his chest, his neck, and Stiles straightens instinctively, pulling his shoulders back and dropping them down, lifting his chin.

"Very nice," Derek approves. The sight of Stiles knelt at his feet is beguiling, and Derek's eyes go red as he growls out his gratification; his heart picks up speed, thundering against his breastbone, body twitching with the urge to reach down and *take*. But he needs to stay slow. His sub is only just teetering on the more cognizant side of subspace, and Derek has more caretaking that he needs to do. His concern right now should be for Stiles. Not himself.

He lifts his hand to stroke Stiles' head, maybe press it to his thigh, and-

Stiles goes rigid, a little whine stutters from his throat, fades in and out but doesn't stop. He's frightened, and stares with alert and suddenly focused eyes right at Derek's crotch, where his erection still flourishes. The boy cowers away, hands lifting, fluttering at his chest, as if unsure whether to hold himself for comfort or shove himself away.

Derek's accomplishment suddenly feels sour, and he relaxes his grip from where it was trying to keep Stiles from jolting away. "Oh. Fuck," he says, suddenly realizing what this is about. "No. No, that's not it. Stiles!" He fumbles beside himself and grabs up a corner of the bedspread to flip over his rapidly wilting cock. "That's not. Stiles. Shit. That's not what I meant for you to--"

He reaches for Stiles, going for his upper arms. "I only wanted to *feed* you--"

But Stiles throws himself back, scrambles away on his knees, hands pushing at the floor. He keens, a high, broken thread of anguish. Stupidly, Derek follows him, hands reaching outward. "Stiles, no, I'm not going to hurt you! Stop. Please, Stiles. "I'm not--"

Stiles' eyes are wide and glassy, twitching frantically back and forth, and Derek isn't even sure that he is what Stiles is seeing right now. Stiles' heart races, a sickening, lurching peal, and Derek kind of wants to clap his hands over his own ears, to block out the sound. He crouches in front of the bed, one hand held out, the other pulling the bedspread free to drape in front of his body, trying to give the boy a little space. "Listen, Stiles," he speaks too rapidly. "I am *not* going to have sex with you. I am not going to ask you to do anything... *anything*... sexual with me. Nothing. Right now, this is only about you, and I only wanted to take care of you. I..." He swallows hard and bites his lip as he watches Stiles' face grow red and then drain of color, watches his expression contort as he lifts his hands to his throat, beginning to hyperventilate.

Derek swallows down his anger, battles a resurgence of the sick, helpless rage he'd felt when Stiles had been assaulted in the cabin. It was careless and stupid and *altogether thoughtless* of him to let Stiles see him naked, to leave a space for him to assume that Derek might in any way ask for more

than Stiles was ready to give. The boy had obviously been entirely inexperienced, something Derek could read before he'd really even interacted with him: he can remember scenting the pure, untapped nature of his innocence that first night, a sweet, clear note underneath the blood and the damp and the terror.

Fuck. What has he done? "Stiles," he clenches his hand into a fist as Stiles' gasps turn into a wheezing, choking rejection. "You have to calm down. You need to *breathe*. Stiles!"

Chapter End Notes

Wow, has it been two weeks already? Y'all, I just want to say how much I love you, and how wonderful it is to get so many comments with each release (even if some weeks my procrastination gets the better of me, and I don't respond to them: um, hello there entire page of wonderful comments). It is amazing to know that there is such a dedicated group of people out there who are so enthusiastic about this story. (And who want me to finish it!!!) With the posting of the last chapter, we broke 2k kudos, which makes this even more popular than [Shatter the Darkness](#) (my most wildly successful work to date). Woo Hoo! I feel like I'm hitting the big time. (Although I felt like that after my first few hundred kudos, so this must be the *bigger* big time.) There are almost 600 *public* bookmarks and 1700 subscriptions. I'm so flattered and bewildered, y'all. I've just reached 100k words total, and I'm trying to wrap it up. Maybe five or six more chapters left to write? (I'm finishing Chapter 28 now.) Hell, yeah, we're getting there!

Repercussions (Oh, shit!)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bile keeps pushing at the back of Stiles' throat, and his eyes sting. His nose stings. He can feel the whole front of his face turning red and... puffy-feeling... as he fights off emotions and memories.

This is why he'd wanted to stay a fox.

He lifts a cold, shaking hand to his throat, drowning in the memory of not being able to breathe, of his mouth filled, lips splitting at the corners. The intrusion. The dull pain of blunt force at his tonsils and beyond. Stinking, scratchy hairs abrading his nose and chin.

He gasps, and the scream he couldn't form on that awful afternoon sounds now: just a wretched, thin, *eeeeee*. His brain thinks *Nonononono*, but nothing that coordinated came from his mouth.

He starts to scramble backwards, but Derek drops to his knees beside him, tears his hands away from where they'd begun scratching at his arms, because the thin bright lines of pain are better than the memories.

"Okay, Stiles. Stop. It's ok. Nothing's going to happen." There is a clatter and a flurry and then the bedspread is being wrapped around Stiles' shoulders. Derek's movements are quick, pulling the blanket tight, and soon Stiles is swaddled, just a burrito of a panicked boy.

"You need to breathe," Stiles hears from far away, and realizes that the spinning of his head, the watery surrealism of his vision might be because he has no oxygen. He gave it a try, terrified, a short, aborted gasp that doesn't accomplish anything. Derek pivots to lean against the bed and pulls the Stiles-bundle against his chest, folding arms and legs around him to keep him safe.

"Breathe with me, Stiles. Come on, baby boy." He sounds a little panicked himself and Stiles wants to laugh, but that isn't working for him either.

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, but that is worse. That is the cold and dank room he'd been locked in. That is not knowing when those men would be back or what they would do. That is loneliness and terror and hopelessness and pain.

But then he can feel scratching at his neck, Derek's scruffy face, and hot, damp air puffing against his ear. Arms hold him tight and still and *safe*. "Breathe," Derek says, a little more calmly. "Come on baby. In for the count of three, out for the same. With me, now. In. One, two, three. Out. One, two, three."

It takes a while. Stiles keeps stalling out and gasping. His lungs won't expand. Won't cooperate for the endless duration of a three-count. He feels so cold, like he is drowning in the Arctic. (Huh, Captain America. Who probably *never* tripped and fell face first into hysteria.) But Derek just holds him closer. "In. One, two three. Out. One, two, three." He rumbles his wolfy version of a purr against Stiles' back at each pause, the sound and vibration of it comforting, assuring Stiles of Derek's indisputable prowess, of his ability to erupt into protective violence, of his status as Stiles' guardian, his Alpha, his Dom.

Eventually the wavering quality of his vision settles, and Stiles realizes he has been staring wide-eyed, fixedly at the wheels of his desk chair. He sighs. The exhalation is a hiccuping, weak little thing, and Derek lifts a hand to stroke over his ear, smoothing away clammy sweat with no judgement. He shifts Stiles again, a little sideways so that he can duck his head into the crook of Derek's neck and hide there.

They'd been in this same position in the cell.

But now it is safer. Now he is warming up. Now he is in the familiar confines of his bedroom. Derek rumbles constantly now that he doesn't have to count, and he strokes everything he can. The vibrations against his shoulder are a derivative of a soft growl meant to soothe the one in his arms but warn away any intruder, and Stiles holds on to that with everything he has, lets its rhythm influence his breath until at last he is breathing without strain. Without fear.

He goes limp, in the aftermath, and Derek begins mumbling nonsense in his ear once again, interspersed with phrases like, *let me take care of you* and *you're so good for me* and *I'll keep you safe. Never again.*

"Are you okay?" Derek asks at last, hand still protectively holding Stiles head against the strength of his shoulder.

After a hitched gasp, Stiles nods, and now when he closes his eyes, he is in a familiar place. He can smell Derek in a way he never could in the cellar, before being turned. Derek's scent is rain on hot asphalt, rich humus on the forest floor, and heat embodied, all underlain with salt and sex and worry. Even with his human ears Stiles can hear Derek's heart beating, compelling and steady and de-escalating now that Stiles is settling.

Derek starts slowly rubbing his face against Stiles' head: through his hair, across his scalp, down the long sides of his neck. Stiles is pliant, not really understanding what Derek is doing, but allowing his Dom to do as he pleases. Derek leans him back over one arm, like a fainting heroine, and rubs himself against Stiles' cheeks, his mouth, his temples. Softly, Derek presses his lips where his prickly scruff had passed. Not kisses, really. Just an intimate way to connect, to reassure them both.

Stiles moves to touch him, but he's fully tangled in the tight wrap of the blanket: he'll have to wait until Derek releases him. Somehow, that's a pleasing thought. A safe space. Reassuring.

Derek puts his lips fully on Stiles', and he reacts enough to twitch his own, a facsimile of a kiss. So Derek lingers, kissing him softly, chastely, with no further intent than connecting the two of them. Stiles favors it. Lets his lips cling, release, grow slowly plump with warm blood. (He can *hear* the rushing of blood, his own and Derek's, a sign of life. They made it. They made it out. And Stiles doesn't have to think about it any more. He won't. He stubbornly keeps his mind blank. Not thinking. Only feeling.)

He closes his eyes. Lets Derek dote on him, his low-voiced murmur a gentle wash of sound rather than words.

He's out within minutes.

Stiles wakes up to footsteps in the hallway, and goes rigid for a moment before his brain catches up. He's not in the dark, musty cellar, and those footsteps are as familiar as the accompanying heartbeat: his father is home. Stiles is still confined in the blanket, arms and legs tightly bound. Derek is behind him, stretched out on the bed they evidently transferred to in the night, holding Stiles close against his chest; and Stiles can hear Derek waking as well, the sudden acceleration of his heart and stutter of breath.

The bedroom door opens before either of them moves, and John sticks his head inside, softly saying, "Stiles?"

The bedroom is not dark. Not only is his bedside clock glowing blue, *2:13am*, John had considerately put an LED nightlight under Stiles' window when he first returned from his kidnapping. He hadn't said anything about it, had simply taken it out of the junk drawer and plugged it in where it could cast the widest unobstructed fan of light. There are five of them around the house now, in the hallways and bathrooms.

It is obvious that John is able to see the two of them cuddled together on the bed, and Stiles hears an almost subvocal growl from his dad that he wouldn't have guessed could come from human lungs.

"*What are you doing with my son?*" John grits out.

"Nothing, sir," Derek replies. He sounds calm, but his heart pounds and a sour note that Stiles instinctively knows is nerves begins to drift through the air. Derek sits up, and the sheet he's pulled over himself falls to his waist, revealing his naked chest. "I was able to guide him into shifting back after dropping him--"

John pants, and the spreading tide of his anger feels overwhelming to Stiles, whose fingers begin to twitch. He would scratch at his arms if they weren't pinioned straight by his sides. Derek senses his agitation, and puts one large hand on Stiles' chest. "Be still," he says, so quietly that John *probably* can't hear it, and flashes his eyes red just briefly. It's strange how calming that is, Stiles thinks, how this blatant indicator of monstrosity should make him feel so shielded. Derek's command is implied, but vividly clear: "Stay still and don't worry; I am going to handle this." And how odd is it that *Dad* is a situation that needs handling, is something that is making him feel afraid and uncertain?

John strides over to the bed, fists clenched by his thighs. "I want you to stand up and I want you to *leave this house right. now.* do you understand?" He is speaking to Derek, but grabs at Stiles' shoulder and starts to pull him upright before he notices that he's wrapped so tightly in the blanket that he can't move. Derek growls instinctively, and puts his hand on Stiles' other shoulder, holding him down. "Sir, you need to calm down--"

John is having none of that. He pulls at Stiles again, wrenching the blanket away. "Get out. I'm so--" he stops himself. "I can't believe you have the *nerve-*" Stiles flinches and squeezes his eyes shut: he feels disoriented and dizzy, and when his Dad finally gets hold of the edge of his blanket and tugs forcefully, rolling Stiles suddenly to his stomach and then back to his back his confusion and syncope reach visceral levels.

"*Stop!*" Derek puts all the force of Dom and Alpha into his words, and John does stop, frozen for an incredulous, enraged moment, allowing Derek to finish a sentence. "You. Are. *Scaring* him!"

Look at his face.”

Stiles lies there rigid, and he knows from the icy chill tingling on the surface of his skin that his father will be able to see how ashen he’s become, even in the distant glow of the nightlight. His eyes are wide, and his teeth chatter, and he can’t stop flinching. With only the tail of the blanket left to cover his nudity, Stiles is too exposed. Vulnerable. He begins scratching furrows into the delicate skin just above his wrist. Twitching. He’s so twitchy.

John looks taken aback, and a little of the blind rage seeps away, but he keeps his frown.

“I will hand him over to you,” Derek says slowly, keeping John locked in the intensity of his gaze. He puts his hand over Stiles’, stilling his efforts at self-mutilation. “But only if he agrees and if you can be calm. You have an issue with me, you need to address it *later*, when we are *alone*, do you understand?”

Stiles has never heard anyone speak to his Dad like this before, but he’s *so relieved* that Derek is saying this, because witnessing his father so angry and with such violent movements is vertiginously terrifying. John clenches his teeth so tightly that Stiles can hear his jaw pop, but he gives a short nod and shuts his eyes briefly. “He’s *my son*,” he grates, still angry, but not quite as outraged, voice lowered to more conversational levels. “I don’t need you to tell me how to take care of him.”

Derek sighs. “You need to remember that he’s not entirely human anymore, either. There’s gonna be a learning curve.”

“I let you in my house! I left you with my son, and. And. I *never* gave you permission to drop him. You. That makes you no better than his fucking *c-captors*, you-”

Derek interrupts John’s developing tirade, squeezing Stiles hand before standing up and moving to the office chair, where his clothes are piled.

“Jesus christ,” John breathes, distracted, staring at the newly revealed naked man. “What did you *do*? He’s *barely sixteen*.” He starts for Derek, fists forward and ready, expression murderous, “I’m gonna *kill* you-”

Stiles shakes his head frantically, lurches up to stop his Dad, falling face first to the floor across his father’s feet when he trips over his trailing blanket. Stumbling over his son, John goes down hard on one knee. Stiles’ breathing is frantic and shallow, and John pauses long enough to check to be sure he’s alright.

Derek uses the time to put on his pants and slip on his shirt. “I did *not* take advantage of him,” he retorts sharply, and only Stiles can hear the little blip in his heartbeat that betrays his lie, sees the slight shamed wince around his eyes, catches the unctuous waft of guilt. “He was desperate and wound up and needed dropping. We’re naked because *that’s what you are when you shift forms*. That is *all*.” He jams his feet into his boots and stuffs his socks into a pocket. “If I leave, I need to be sure you won’t frighten Stiles into a panic attack.”

John calms down a bit, Stiles can smell a curl of shame under all the anger and custodial instinct. Stiles tries to calm a bit as well, tries to stop the ineffective *heh heh heh* of lungs that feel ossified. Derek’s scent stays steady and comforting: he’s clearly geared for battle, but still totally in control.

After a few measured breaths through his nose, John does calm down, heart slowing to a more regular pace, and his emotions seem more settled, if unchanged. Derek relaxes marginally as this new information filters in through scent and sight and sound. He nods his head. "We need to talk," he says, and holds up a hand before John can respond, shaking his head. "Tomorrow. When will you be free?"

John looks down at Stiles, who has curled up at his feet to hide his nudity, twisting his fingers in the shallow scratches on his arm as if it's all he can do not to tear into them further. John sighs and sinks back down to sit on his heels, one hand on Stiles' head. "I'll be home at six," he says grudgingly.

Derek bites his lip and then makes eye contact with Stiles. "Stiles, are you okay to stay with your dad?"

Stiles nods, although he really, *really* isn't. But they both know the situation would exacerbated if they don't back off. John huffs, offended, and then ignores Derek when he backs out of the room and shuts the door.

John wraps his arms around his son and starts saying something in a low voice, but Stiles focuses only on Derek, who speaks under his breath as he leaves the house.

"You did good, baby boy," Derek whispers. "I know that sucked, but you did really well, okay? And I know you're scared right now. I'm sorry we were fighting in front of you, I really am. But that's a little thing, okay? You're still safe. You're safe, and your father loves you. That's what this is all about, okay, honey? He loves you and he wants to protect you. So you need to let him do that. Need to let him make sure you're all right, because *he's scared too*, right, you know that. I know you can smell it on him." The front door opens and closes again, and Derek's booted feet mark his path down the steps of the front porch.

Stiles can still hear him clearly, even as he walks across the yard; the door of his car squeaks when he opens it. Stiles can hear his voice, and hear his heart, and he clings to both, curled in around the bright thread inside himself that resonates with a potent sense of *Derek*.

"I'll be back tomorrow at six o'clock, sweet thing. I'm coming back and we'll work this out. And if you need me before that, you just call." The key twists in the ignition, and the rumble of the Camaro fails to drown out Derek's comforting stream of words. "Can you make a little noise for me, honey? So I know you're alright. Make a sound for me, baby, and then I'll be back for you tomorrow."

Stiles closes his eyes, and is startled to feel the hot trail of a tear blazing the side of his face. His Dad is still talking, but Stiles ignores him for the moment. He takes a deep breath and blows it out in a breathy little sigh, just a tiny bit of vocalization, and he dips his head, absurdly proud, when he hears Derek chuckle quietly in his car. "Good job, Stiles. I'll see you tomorrow." The car pulls away, and Stiles listens to it fade and segue into his Dad's urgent voice.

"Stiles? Son? I really need you to answer me! Are you okay?" Stiles presses his thumbnail next to a rounded drop of blood on his arm and watches as it flattens and flows, drawing a red line at the quick of his nailbed. He looks up after a moment and nods, eyes focused more on John's ear than his face. His father still reeks of fury and violence, and Stiles can't really bear to look at him, when everything inside him is longing for Derek, when the savage emotions rolling off his father hold such recent and traumatic connotations for him. But he finally swallows hard and nods.

John's scent drifts towards relief, and he stands up to get a t-shirt and pajama pants out of Stiles' dresser. "Here son," he kind of muscles Stiles back onto the bed and guides his arms into the shirt. Stiles shrugs away to get the pants himself, and narrows his eyes angrily. He bares his teeth in a silent growl and then shoves at his father's shoulder, hard.

John takes a startled step back, face nearly blank with astonishment. "Are you angry? With *me*?"

Stiles rolls his eyes and snaps his teeth. *Duh, yes, I'm angry with you, you asshole.* He grabs a tissue from the nightstand and blots up the few drops of blood from his scratches, surreptitiously swipes at his eyes.

John crouches down next to the bed, hands limp where he has his forearms propped on his knees. He takes a deep breath, sounds frustrated and embarrassed. "Well," he says. "I'm *sorry* if coming home to find you *naked in bed with a Dom we hardly know* was surprising to me."

Stiles curls his lip and turns his shoulder, staring angrily at the wall. *Yeah, thanks for asking first, you know. Not like I needed any respect or anything. Not like you interrupted anything.* He balls the tissue up in his fist. *Not like that was something I really needed.* He's appalled to feel the hot prickling in his nose and behind his eyes that means he's about to bawl. He lifts his eyes to the ceiling, hoping no tears will spill over.

"Stiles," his Dad's voice gentles. He can read the signs as well as Stiles can. He moves to sit next to Stiles and wraps him in his arms, stubbornly keeps him there when Stiles tries to shrug away. "I'm sorry I scared you."

In spite of keeping his eyes wide open, tears spill over anyway, and Stiles *hates* himself for being so weak. He turns to rest his cheek against his Dad's shoulder, just in order to conceal his face. The same hand that's held him all his life curves around the back of his head. "Alright, son. It's alright." And it shouldn't be so jarring to hear comfort in his Dad's voice, but it is (God, how he wants Derek) and that makes Stiles tighten himself down further, because he really, *really* doesn't want to fall apart. Doesn't want the comfort his Dad can offer. He just sits there, silently battling his fucking emotions and hormones until he can breathe evenly again.

When Stiles sits back upright, John leans forward to bump foreheads, gently, and pets down the length of his spine. But just because Stiles has regained control doesn't mean he forgives his Dad for this huge breach of etiquette, and he frowns furiously before twisting to the side and throwing himself down on his pillows. He wriggles beneath the blanket and his newly enhanced nose can smell Derek's skin in the warm air trapped underneath. Sullenly, he pulls the blanket over his head, and hears his father sigh in discouragement. The mattress dips as John shifts on it, and his hand grasps Stiles' shoulder through the blanket.

"We need to talk about what's going on here, son," he says. "You're too young to scene with anyone," his voice breaks, and Stiles can hear him swallowing and choking on words. "I don't. I didn't handle it well. I. I often wish your Mom were still here. I know that- I sometimes wish one of us had been a sub, just so we could. But. She would have done better with you than I do. Even as a Domme she'd. Have had a better perspective." His hand runs up and down Stiles arm, finding it unerringly under the bedclothes.

"You're too young." John's inhale is stuttered and harsh, and his voice shakes with suppressed tears when he finally continues. "You're too *young* for this, Stiles. None of the past few weeks should have happened. And I don't. I don't know how to make it better. I don't even know what all *happened* to you. I don't. I can't."

John makes a noise then, that no child should ever hear from a parent, a low, pitiful kind of stifled wail that preceded silent tears. “I’m supposed to *protect* you—”

And even angry, Stiles can’t stand it, can’t stand hearing his father fall apart. He pops up from his hideaway and folds John into a hug, holding him tightly, a solid Stilinski special. And his Dad hugs him back, unsubtly pulling his own tissue free of the box and wiping at his eyes, wafting the scent of saline and sorrow into the air currents.

“I’m sorry, son,” John whispers, a susurrus of regret and anguish. “I’m so sorry.” Over and over as they clutch at each other.

Finally, the intensity of the moment fades, and Stiles pulls away. He touches his Dad’s cheek briefly, taps it a few times. *You’re forgiven, Dad.* But he does quirk half his mouth into a kind of sideways smile, eyebrows theatrically pulled down. *But don’t pull that shit again, you hear me?*

John seems to get it, huffs a little laugh before pulling Stiles a little closer to plant a kiss on his forehead. “Alright, kid. Go to sleep, and we’ll talk about it tomorrow, alright?”

Stiles smiles and flops back down into his nest. John slaps his shoulder before heading for the door. But once there he pauses, turns around, one hand on the doorknob, and looks at Stiles in the dim blue light that illuminates the room. “It’s nice to have you back, Stiles. I mean, back in the house, of course. But back in your own skin, too. I’m. So *happy* to see your face.” He cuts himself off, seems to search for words and then give up. He just nods his head and crosses his arms. “Good to have you back,” he says once more before vanishing down the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: I actually just had a panic attack (in the middle of DragonCon, which is a very poor place to do it: surrounded by some 70k people all in bizarre costume and concrete buildings so tall and crowded they feel like dizzying walls) and it was more or less *nothing* like I described here, heh. Well, the trouble breathing and thinking and focusing. And the fear. But not much else. Really, it was almost more like a bad trip (an experience I haven’t sought out in nearly two decades). Ugh, what a fucking day to forget my xanax.

And in better news: If you want to know one of my favorite Sterek fics of all time (I probably read it a few times a year, omg, what is my life), I offer unto you [Lap Magnet](#) by [Prairie_Grass](#), which I pulled out once I’d somewhat recovered my brain after the panic attack, because I needed a familiar, feel-good read. Probably y’all’ve read it already. But if not, it’s a good time. Go forth!

Not Necessarily So Great to Be Back

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dad left to get a half a night's rest before his day shift, and Stiles knows how much he needs it.

Stiles cannot fall back asleep, himself, still jittery and wound up from the dramatic confrontation between the two Doms in his life. He'd been so unprepared for it, deeply asleep and safe in a warm embrace: he's still reeling, and feels desperate and unravelled.

He huddles deeper in his blankets, tries to wrap them around himself as Derek had done, but doesn't accomplish much more than a sloppy roll. He's cold, sluggish; his movements feel a beat too late, as if he's lagging, a glitch in real time. After an hour or two of shivering and misery, he comes to a fuzzy realization that he might be in sub drop. He'd really liked what Derek had done with him during their scene (if he could subtract the whole penis/panic attack portion of it). So now he focuses on that, on Derek's hands stroking over his body (both bodies: over soft fur as well as skin), and feels a little warmer, a little calmer and more stable.

He wriggles backward until he can press himself against the wall and closes his eyes tightly, pretending that it is Derek behind him, fierce and protective. But the wall is cold, and no matter how hard he tries to envision otherwise, his body knows it is alone, and little shivers continue to wrack him as he waits for the dawn.

Stiles goes downstairs when he hears his father rattling around in the kitchen, when the aroma of coffee floats up the stairs and tickles his nose like a ribbon of scent from an old cartoon. He keeps the blanket wrapped around himself, and his legs feel uncertain, wobbly: it is strange to be two-legged and tall once more, and the corner of his mouth twitches in a self-deprecating smirk at how quickly being four-legged and 8 inches high had become the new normal.

John is tentative with him this morning, and seems to have trouble meeting his eyes. He's also awkward, which is usually Stiles' domain. However, the room smells of bright cucumber *relief*, so Stiles is certain that John is happy he's home, happy that he's human (or human *appearing*, at least). Stiles shuffles into a hug that's satisfying, for all that, and then drops into a chair, watching as his dad gets together breakfast.

"I'm sorry I upset you last night." It's the first thing John says, and he waits to speak until he's set coffee and toasted waffles in front of them both.. "I was. Surprised. And I didn't handle it well." He reaches across the table and wraps his hand around Stiles' wrist, as he reaches for the coffee. "We're going to talk about that more tonight after work, when Hale comes over. But for now, I just want you to know that there are things I wish I'd said first, last night." Stiles goes still and waits for his dad to elaborate, relaxes a little at the gentle and familiar back and forth of John's fingers against his skin.

"I'm glad to have you back." John says this heavily, with great certainty. "I've been so scared for you, Stiles. And I'm just. Extraordinarily grateful to have you back in one piece."

Stiles frowns a little at that, and his free hand lifts towards his throat before he's thought about what he's doing and quickly drops it back to his lap. *In one piece* is debatable, if anyone's asking him.

John's eyes are sharp, and they don't miss the truncated movement. "Hmmm. Derek reported that he'd never heard you speak," he says, thinking aloud. "I just thought you were mad at me, last night. Or. Or tired or something. But I should have- Can you not talk, Stiles?" He takes a deep breath, eyes luminous with the prospect of tears, and his scent suddenly stings with anger and, strangely, *hurt*.

Stiles just stares back at him, and quite suddenly, he doesn't know *how* to speak, like he's never even used vocal cords before. He opens his mouth, tenses the muscle of his tongue, takes in air. And then. And then just lets it back out. He tries again, thinking, *Of course I talk, Dad. When have you known me not to talk?* But he feels frozen. The words are suspended in his chest, locked in his head with no egress, and although Stiles clenches his hands (discovers his father holding one tight, trying with him, trying to do it *for* him, because Stiles is his son, is his baby, and no father wants to see his child hurting or afraid or floundering and in need of help) he finds he cannot command his body to make noise, much less access language. As if there is another presence inside him in charge of vocalizing that has gone on strike, indifferent to Stiles' own wants and needs. A part of him that put its foot down and *forbade* him to speak.

Stiles gives up after his third aborted effort, not even having so much as produced the little whine he knows he can make now. He slumps back in his chair, tethered by his hand to his father, who draws a shaking breath and presses his own free hand across his eyes, pushing hard enough against his head that the edges of his palm whiten. Stiles can hear the lurching stutter of his heart as he takes it in, accepts that his kid is *mute*, and knows of no way to comfort him.

"Okay," John breathes after taking a minute to compose himself. He swallows hard. "I'll call Melissa this morning, from work, and get started on finding you some help. We'll. It's probably just. A cold or something."

Stiles gives his dad an incredulous look, and John laughs a little, wiping his hand across his eyes again. "Right. Well." He takes another deep breath and slaps his palms against the table as he pushes himself to standing. He tosses his uneaten waffles into the trash and downs the last of his coffee. He shrugs into his jacket and holsters his gun before crouching beside Stiles, taking his hand again. "Does anything *hurt*, son? I. I got that video, and I saw. How they beat you. Stiles, honey. It was bad. And I know that Dr. Deaton said you were fine, and Derek says you heal faster, and it's true, I don't see anything—" he cuts himself off and then gently tugs Stiles upright before unwrapping him from his blanket.

He looks critically at Stiles' arms, and then lifts his shirt to check him back and front. Except for his neck, Stiles' skin is unblemished, at this point. John wraps the blanket back around Stiles' shoulders, pulling it tight, like a hug. "Did they hurt you anywhere else? Do you need a doctor right now? Or. Or. A rape kit?" John rolls in his lips, clamping down on them until they nearly vanish; and his eyebrows are pulled so low that Stiles can hardly see his eyes. "Because I can call in..."

But Stiles shakes his head, wide-eyed. Nothing hurts more than bruising and exhaustion, and the idea of a stranger poking and prodding at him is nearly overwhelming. They both know it's far too late for a rape kit, but Stiles recognizes that this is just John's way of asking if he's been sexually assaulted. Which. Yeah. He's not going there.

So he keeps shaking his head, and his father can clearly read his desperation. "Okay, son. Okay." He clasps Stiles' head and tilts it up for a kiss on the forehead. "I'll have Melissa send Scott over

as soon as school's out. So you won't be alone for too long. And call me—" he stops, looks at Stiles' bruised throat, and purses his lips. "Text me if you need *anything*. Alright?"

Stiles nods and makes shooing motions with his hands, which elicits a weak smile. "I love you," John says, with a brisk rub through Stiles' fuzzy hair. "I hate that I have to go to work. Be careful and keep the door locked. And *please* call me if you need me, because *I will come*, got it? For any reason."

Stiles rolls his eyes and pushes his father out the door. He stops smiling as soon as it's closed, engaging all three locks before shuffling back into the kitchen. His coffee needs microwaving, and he shoves both waffles in his mouth while he waits, forgoing the nasty-ass 'heart-healthy' syrup that has been sitting in the cabinet for over a year, because neither of them will eat it. So in a way, it's the most effective heart health tool in the kitchen, since Stiles won't buy more until this is gone, and it's too disgusting to eat. He eyes the clock. It's just before ten, which means it'll be five hours until Scott arrives.

Stiles brings his coffee upstairs and curls himself into the furthest corner of his bed after a detour to the bathroom to take his meds (finally!) The bed still smells of him and Derek, easily discernable under the aroma of coffee, and Stiles arranges his blanket and pillows to barricade himself from the rest of the world. His phone is charging on the nightstand: Dad must have found it somewhere around the Jeep. It's probably overflowing with texts and messages, so he doesn't turn it on. Too much stimulation already.

He spends the next five hours alternately shivering and staring listlessly at the window. The tree outside is a leafless sycamore, white trunk leprously peeling and ghostly in the diffused light of the overcast day. Twigs beckon and scratch in the blustering wind like they've become animated.

Stiles keeps having thoughts like, *I should get up and do something* or *I should at least listen to some music*. But instead he's trapped in his body. Still. Chilled. Silent. He pulls the pillow Derek had rested on under his blanket and holds it to his chest, snuggling pathetically against it. The lingering, loamy scent of Derek is strong, but his warmth is long gone.

Everything has blurry edges. Even Stiles.

Eventually he hears the whirr of bicycle tires and the thud and clatter as Scott drops it on the walk to the front porch. Scott is easy to track by sound: he bounds up the steps, Stiles hears him singing under his breath, tone deaf as always. He bangs on the door a few times, calling out, "Stiles? Stiles, are you here?"

Stiles doesn't answer, *of course*, because he can't. He *could* get up and answer the door, but his inertia is too strong, so he stays where he is. Scott knocks a few more times before the hiss of a zipper means he's dipped into his backpack and is fishing around for a key. Stiles smiles a little: he'd wondered how long it would take Scott to remember that he had it. Scott tears through the house, as comfortable here as Stiles is at Casa McCall, straight up to Stiles' room. He pushes through the door and runs straight to Stiles. "Stiles," he says again, and this time his voice is strained and choppy. "Oh, my god, Stiles. I was starting to be afraid we'd never see you again."

Scott crawls across the bed to the blanket-wrapped bundle that is Stiles and hauls him unhesitatingly into his arms, tucking his face down to where Stiles shoulder might be, hidden under the blanket. "God. *Stiles*."

Stiles closes his eyes and pushes back, an armless hug of his own. He's momentarily glad he can't talk, because he doesn't even know what to say, and *certainly* doesn't want to tell Scott about what

happened. But the simple animal comfort that Scott instinctively offers is hydration for a parched soul, and Stiles soaks it up, curling close to his best friend in the same position they'd often taken throughout their long years together.

Scott is a Dom, he'd presented shortly after Stiles, and the dynamic of their friendship seemed to make more sense to outsiders, in that light. Stiles wonders if he can somehow *smell* it on him, now. His easy confidence and power, mixed in with sweaty boy and spicy deodorant. Stiles buries his nose in his friend and simply *is*. And Scott, uncharacteristically perceptive, allows it, just strokes Stiles' bristly head and mumbles nonsense at him.

"Mom said you can't talk," he says eventually. He moves his hand down, to wrap around the nape of Stiles' neck, and instead of grinning, as he would have before, Stiles flinches violently away, leaving Scott to stare at him, wide-eyed and surprised. "I'm sorry," he says slowly. "Did I hurt you?" His gaze drops to Stiles neck, exposed now that the blanket has been dislodged, and he frowns when he sees Stiles' bruising.

He lifts his hand to touch, but Stiles jerks back again, shaking his head and gasping. "Okaay," Scott shows his palms and moves back a little. "I just wanted to see..." he trails off, and looks at Stiles expectantly for a moment, as if waiting for him to jump into the conversational void. When Stiles doesn't, he seems to finally realize the magnitude of what happened.

"Your throat got hurt and so you can't talk? Dude? Is that why you aren't wearing your collar?"

Stiles ducks his head, hand covering his neck. Scott is suddenly less comforting than he is mildly distressing. He feels naked without his collar, no matter what trouble it's brought him in the past. It was okay as a fox, since *everything* was strange. But as a human again, dressed in hairless skin and gawky limbs, accoutered with human mores, being collarless leaves him feeling vulnerable and exposed. And, more than that, anchorless, drifting. Unclaimed and unsafe.

"Okay, okay," Scott sits back against the wall, remembering to kick his shoes off this time before curling his feet up on the bed. He pats the spot next to him, inviting Stiles back for a cuddle. "I won't. I won't touch it. Is that it? You don't mind if I hug you, right?"

Stiles shrugs a little in answer to that. He feels very... timid in an animal way... about approaching Scott. But the comfort he offers is too strong an incentive, so Stiles dives in.

"Nobody told me what happened to you," Scott muses, as both of them stare out the window, watching the tree dancing in the wind. "Your dad's been frantic, you know. We all were. The whole school knows you got kidnapped or something, and there've been posters all over with a number to call for info. I think your dad got a lot of false leads. He told Mom it was really frustrating." Stiles makes a creaky little hum, but of course Scott wouldn't know how unusual that is. "Yeah, man," he continues. "There were even posters in the cafeteria and on the library kiosk. You're famous now."

Stiles shudders and covers his face, shaking his head. Yeah. Great. He was pretty 'famous' before, insofar as everyone knew who (and more importantly, *what*) he was. They didn't like him, or respect him, mind you, but they all knew him, for damn sure. Getting even more attention from his schoolmates was likely to be a very bad thing, and Stiles blanches to even consider it.

"So now we all know you're back," Scott goes on, "but no one knows what happened. There are some weird rumors going around. That you ran away, or that your dad actually sent you to some sub-discipline boot camp. That you got married off. They're all idiots. I mean, if your dad sent

you to camp, he'd hardly put up posters to find you, would he?" Scott laughed a little, oblivious to how stiff Stiles was becoming. "Like being insubordinate is worth missing two weeks of school, amiright? Anyway, not like that's new, is it? Heh. You're *always* insubordinate."

Stiles was starting to wish that Scott hadn't come at all. The visit is less soothing than it is infuriating and humiliating. To think that his classmates were disrespecting him even as he was kidnapped and tortured, thinking that he wasn't obedient enough to be a 'good' sub. Probably they'd think his treatment was earned and justified. He claws his fingers around his wrists, trying not to scratch at himself.

"Besides, they found Rosco out on Old Route 53, didn't they? And *everyone* knows how much you love that old Jeep. No way you'd leave him there if you just up and *ran away*, psht."

Stiles curls tighter into his blanket and guiltily hopes that Scott will leave soon. Or at least shut up.

"Anyways, I'm *so* glad you're back, buddy. I was really scared for you, but here you are, in one piece, and hardly hurt at all, huh, just some laryngitis. You'll be back at school like nothing ever happened by next week, I'm sure."

Stiles wants to roll his eyes. Count on Scott to simplify everything and then color it in kittens and rainbows. But instead he just shrugs, makes some meaningless little move that'll make Scott think he's participating in the conversation. Scott hums amiably.

"Hey, you remember Allison? The neutral girl that transferred here last month? She's been helping me out a lot while you were gone. I mean. She knew we were best friends, so she's been real supportive while you were vanished." Scott nods foolishly and grins. "I asked her out over the weekend, and she said that was cool. We got some afternoon pancakes at Mattie's and then bowled for a while. A double date with Jackson and Lydia. It was *amazing*."

Scott sighs and clasps his hands together like a damn Disney princess, and Stiles wants to slap him in frustration. He'd been tortured, beaten and *assaulted*, for *weeks*, and Scott used that same time to get cozy with some girl. It was just. Well, it was pretty much Scott in a nutshell, actually. He'd never been able to think about too many things at one time. But, rational or not, it stings that Scott hadn't put his life on pause while his best friend was missing.

After a while they pull out the laptop and settle down for a movie. Scott runs downstairs to fix some popcorn and raid the fridge, coming back with a strange assortment of snacks, drinks and leftovers. Stiles isn't picky, though, realizing he hasn't eaten anything today but a couple frozen waffles this morning. He digs into the popcorn and cracks open a Coke, silently saluting Scott with it before turning to the screen.

They make their way through a handful of new Daredevil episodes before Scott's phone starts buzzing repeatedly. "It's Allison!" he says excitedly, one cheek stuffed and distorted with a quickly diverted mouthful of cold spaghetti. "Look!" He shows Stiles the screen, which has a picture of a fair-skinned, dark-haired girl with a charming grin; she looks vaguely familiar. He smirks and nods, nudging Scott's side to communicate something along the lines of, *Way to go, dude. She looks like a catch. How on earth did you score that without my invaluable wingmanship?*

Scott happily accepts a high five, and then Stiles goes back to Daredevil while Scott gets absorbed in his text exchange. When Scott somewhat sheepishly asks if Allison can come over, Stiles shrugs and nods, although he *really* doesn't like the prospect of someone new and more or less unknown

to him getting all up in his safe space at the moment. He vehemently doesn't want to be stared at, or judged.

But Scott is glowing with excitement and pride, and Stiles would hate to burst his bubble. It's always hard to deny Scott when he gets this enthusiastic. The doorbell rings not fifteen minutes later, and Scott bounds out of bed (more canine than even Stiles or Derek, Stiles thinks with a quiet snort) and thunders down the stairs to welcome her inside.

Stiles can hear their greeting, even over the epic fight on-screen (Daredevil is such a BAMF sub). And then there's the unmistakable wet slurp of some serious kissing. Welp. They got to that part fast; hadn't Scott said that their first date was only a few days ago? Stiles is pretty insulted that Scott had been so pleasantly occupied for the duration of his captivity. They're bros. Bros don't go get hot new girlfriends while their other bro is being fucking tortured. Ugh.

Stiles wrinkles his nose and tries to ignore it, focusing instead on watching Matt Murdock spin and kick and karate-chop his blind-ass way through about 15 hard-core ninjas. It is entertaining enough that Stiles is actually startled when Scott bounces into the room, towing his new girlfriend behind him, flashing about a 500-watt smile. "Stiles, this is my... Allison. You remember her? Allison," he turns around to her and immediately transforms into someone so dopey that Stiles would be embarrassed for him if he hadn't just taken his first inhale....

The rest of the introduction fades into grating white noise as the scent surrounding Allison comes into focus. There is perfume, and dirt and fertilizer, and a metallic tang that he knows is gunpowder (his father smells of it, too). But there is something else under that, pungently fiery, an acrid, oily residue that had saturated the tiny room where he and Derek had been held captive.

What had Derek called it? Aconite?



Notes: Aha! An Argent arrives on the scene. What's Stiles gonna do?

Y'all, I had a writer's crisis over the weekend, and became convinced that I was wandering in forlorn and pointless circles in my story (or, as Stephen King put it, my "gigantic boondoggle of a manuscript") and sent out a cry for a fresh perspective, to which [themuller13](#) answered. (I'm not sure if y'all realize the magnitude of her offer... I asked her to read 100k words of unfinished story that *wasn't even in her fandom*, like whoa.) The end result is I'm pretty happy and am gonna try to streamline some future chapters and plotlines (ack, so much work!). But what I'm getting at here is that, not only did this amazing person give me her entire weekend, she [**ALSO MADE ME COVER ART!!!**](#) I'm posting it here, just so y'all can see it, but I'll put it in Chapter 1 in a bit, like a normal person. Anyhoo, I don't have much Teen Wolf presence on Tumblr, which means it's only got a tiny handful of notes, so if y'all are on Tumblr, maybe you could give it a little [signal boost](#)? Because it's beautiful, and because it took a lot of time and was such a generous gift.

A Surprising Turn of Events OR Don't Shock the Fox

Chapter Notes

Oh, shoot y'all. So much stuff came up today, and I've only made a single run through this chapter, so there might be many glaring errors. Eh. I decided you'd rather have it tonight than tomorrow. Hello, new readers, and old! Thank you for all the lovely comments in the last chapter. I, um, dropped the ball on that one, but it doesn't mean I don't love you and *thoroughly* enjoy the feedback you take so much time to give me.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Everything fades from Stiles' attention except the girl, reeking of their captors. Not Rudy and Gunner specifically, or the other two, but of the odor that had been common to all four hunters. This is a stink that Stiles cannot help but associate with violence and pain and terror; that was the most intense when he and Derek were being gassed in their cell; that had seeped into the very fibers of their clothing and pores of their skin. It had taken many days to fade once they made it back home and were able to wash.

Stiles jolts to his feet, panting through an open mouth, and the ominous smell burgeons into taste as well, until Stiles' senses are fully overwhelmed. He keens - a creaky, desperate sound - and claws at his throat, fingers digging into bruised flesh, trying to find the collar and pull it away so he can breathe. He staggers backward, knocks the lamp off his nightstand and flinches violently at the resulting crash. He trips over the thing in his attempt to shrink back, smashing his shoulder and bruising his hip against the wall in the process. He thinks only *Get away. I have to get away. I have to RUN*, and between one blink and the next, the rounded mouths and shocked faces of both Scott and Allison telescope skyward.

Stiles' next inhale is taken from 8 inches off the ground, through a pointed, fur-covered muzzle, and sharp little nails catch in his carpet when he leaps frantically for the door. He darts between the legs of the looming humans before they are recovered enough to grab for him, and bolts down the hall and thence downstairs.

All the doors are shut, of course they are, because Stiles has impeccable luck. (And also, his dad is determined to keep him safely inside.) He races in a complete circle around the downstairs, but front, kitchen and back doors are all equally inaccessible. He hears Scott lumbering down the hallway after him - "*Stiles?!"* - oversized and clumsily hominid from a fox's smaller, quicker perspective. He scoots past his father's office (door closed), the bathroom (no hiding place), through the kitchen (no cabinet stands invitingly open), skitters between Scott's legs, bounds over pink tennis shoes (*hunter!*) and finds himself in the living room again.

Quick as thought, he wiggles through the triangle-shaped upholstery tear in the back of his dad's recliner. It's a small space under there, and he is acquainted with it from having to fish out phones and keys and other pocket detritus. It is close and dark inside, and Stiles huddles into a terrified, wheezing ball in the corner furthest away from the torn opening.

The voices outside his pitiful haven are loud and surprised and filter through his terror as aggression. He's too panicked to make sense of words, only hears the tone and that overwhelming *captor-smell*. Too many hearts are pounding, there's too much rushing blood and the metallic smell of adrenaline sifts downwards into his hiding place. Stiles pulls himself into an even tighter ball and covers his nose with his paws, ears flat against his head, repudiating reality.

When Derek answers his phone, he is absolutely *not* expecting John to tell him that Stiles had transformed back into his fox form and was panicking under a chair. It wasn't that he was surprised to hear the phone ring, because the frantic feeling in his chest could only be attributed to his bond with Stiles. When he'd felt it, he'd grabbed his jacket and keys and opened the loft door all in the same motion, buzzing with the need to get to Stiles. He'd shaken his head at Isaac, who had turned away from his homework to lift his eyebrows in question. *Later*, he'd mouthed at Isaac's surprised and curious face before closing the door on him.

John sounds taut with tension, straining to be calm. In the background, Derek can hear another voice, strident in its surprise, questioning how the *fuck* Stiles had turned into an animal.

"I'm on my way," he says.

It takes fifteen minutes to get to Stiles' house. There are three cars in the driveway, so Derek slides to a stop across the street before launching out of the car and running to the front door, heart beating fiercely. He can hear the chaos inside, John is talking to Stiles, someone else is muttering questions; Stiles' heart is out of control, and he can hear overwrought panting and squeaky little whistles of desperation.

Poor Stiles sounds more like an asthmatic parrot than a mammal.

Derek enters without knocking, pulled in by Stiles' fear and need. "John?" he asks, just to be polite and let the man know he's in his territory.

"Oh, thank god," John breathes. He stands up as Derek enters, knees creaking a protest. "Hale. He's under here." And he indicates the recliner with a bleeding hand: Derek can see teeth marks across the meat of his thumb. The smell of blood can't be helping Stiles to calm down, and it isn't making Derek feel any better, either.

Derek scopes out the room. There's a boy about Stiles' age there, the distinctive floppy hair and unique jawline identify him as the friend from the picture upstairs. And - what on earth - there's Allison Argent standing quietly against one wall. Derek stops and blinks, and it doesn't take more than a moment for him to fit the pieces together, to make some sense of the scene, although he can't for the life of him think of a positive reason for Allison Argent to be at the Sheriff's house.

"Hello, Allison," he says formally, carefully. Wary. They aren't friends, don't do holidays or anything, but they do get together a couple of times a year to check in, make sure everything is working smoothly on both sides. Their interactions are usually limited to Derek letting the Argents know when an omega comes through, or Chris warning Derek of supernatural sightings or visiting hunters.

Derek narrows his eyes, wondering where the Argents sit on the matter of the hunters who had recently captured him. He had not smelled any Argent on the other hunters, or in the cabin, and he knows that kidnapping and torture is against Chris's Code; but he'd learned to be suspicious after Argent's batshit psychopath of a sister had burned his family to ashes.

Allison discreetly lifts both palms so that Derek could see she is unarmed and presumably not dangerous (although she is as 'not-dangerous' without a weapon as he is, more or less). "Hello, Derek. I don't know what happened—"

John interrupts, looking curiously at the interaction between two people he'd obviously thought hadn't known one another at all. "Something set him off, Derek. Scott says he just started to have a panic attack and then suddenly, er, transformed."

Scott, the boy standing between Allison and John, is pungent with the resinous tang of shock. His eyes are huge, and he wrings his hands together and bites his lip. "He turned into a... . Dude. He turned into a—" Scott stops, doesn't have a word to describe Stiles as a creature. Derek, dismissing the kid as both non-helpful and a non-threat, moves swiftly to the recliner. "You should all leave," he says quietly to John as he kneels. "At least get out of the room. Let me calm him down."

John looks nothing short of devastated to be told to leave the comforting of his son to someone else, but nods his head, acknowledging the practicality of the suggestion. He ushers the two teenagers ahead of him into the kitchen, and Derek himself feels calmer the instant they're all out of sight.

"Stiles," he murmurs, sinking to sit at the back of the chair. "They left." He gradually slides his fingers into the tear in the fabric, and then leaves them there, occasionally twitching, waiting for Stiles' to recognize him, by scent and by sound and by the imponderable bond that joins them. "Come on, Stiles, you're safe. I'm here now."

The mordancy of Stiles' fear lies heavily around the chair, and Derek's heart stutters in sympathy. "Settle down, baby. Shhh, shhhh..." He spends a while just rumbling in his chest, the same comforting noise he'd used while holding Stiles in the dark of their cell, when he'd soothed the boy through both panic attacks and subdrop. He creeps his hand in a bit further, lying on the floor to extend his arm. After a few minutes of glacial progress, he connects with the shivering bundle of fur that is Stiles and hums softly in response to the brief, wet press of Stiles' nose against his skin. Stiles squeaks again, makes a hoarse, chittering kind of trill, and Derek can feel the humid sough of his breath stir the hairs on his wrist.

"Allison set you off, didn't she?" he murmurs, letting his fingers drift through the fur on Stiles' back. Curled up like he is, he's scarcely bigger than Derek's spread hand: but that's a good thing right now, because Derek's instinct is to envelope him, to pull this slight body so close that nothing can touch him, nothing can hurt him. He closes his eyes and rests his cheek on his bicep, listening to the patter of Stiles' heart. "She smells of wolfsbane, I know, just like the hunters who had us." He uses his thumb to sweep down the sharp angle of muzzle, letting the prickle of stiff whiskers scratch at his palm. Stiles' ears are flattened, and both paws are folded over the top of his nose, hiding. "I know her, and I believe that she is safe and... honorable. Stiles, I would have warned you, if I'd had any idea she knew you."

He pauses for a moment to let that sink in, and then scoops the tiny, trembling creature up with one hand around his belly. "Come here, baby," he croons, like a mother coaxing a child, and works

Stiles out of the upholstery hole backwards, making his pale fur stand up in tufts and his ears bounce ridiculously as they get caught and dragged in the edges of the tear.

Derek sits up and hugs Stiles to his stomach, lets the sides of his jacket fall forward to hide him, help make him feel safe and enclosed. “I’m here now. I’ve got you. I’ve got you. You’re okay.”

They just sit for a while. Derek finds the amorphous warmth of their bond and doggedly tries to stoke it with reassurance and concern. His hands stay in motion, smoothing between Stiles’ tightly closed eyes and gently toying with his ears. He is patient, he has all night, Stiles doesn’t need to rush, he can take his time. Derek tries to project this, too; to be a rock, a bulwark, a refuge.

Stiles’ heart gradually slows back to what’s typical for this form (which is still outrageously fast) and his breathing deepens and slows down. A body that had been rigid muscle slowly reverts to soft fur and yielding flesh, and Derek never stops stroking, letting his fingers cover Stiles’ *everything*, reclaiming it all, declaring his tacit ownership and protection for any with eyes or nose to witness.

On the other side of the considerably closed kitchen door, John and the kid - Scott - are talking. Derek keeps half an ear on the conversation, which basically consists of a bunch of “Holy shit... I mean. Sorry Mr. Stilinski. But. What the *fuck*. I. Oops, sorry, sir. What *happened??*”

John uncomfortably dodges the endless barrage of questions, and Derek is grateful to the man for giving him an opportunity to explain the situation for himself. After a few more minutes, he stands with a sigh and mutters to Stiles, “Come on now, let’s go face the music.” Stiles shivers and pushes his nose into Derek’s armpit, *It’s all yours, man, I’m having nothing to do with it*, which makes Derek smile.

When Derek slips into the kitchen to sit at the table with John, Scott is wide-eyed with befuddlement and disbelief... and Allison is wide-eyed with sharp, professional curiosity. Derek takes a deep breath and tongues his teeth for a minute, thinking about how to sum it all up while still not giving too much away. He absently pets Stiles’ back, under his jacket, sweeping from his ears to the tip of his tail, over and over in a gesture that comforts him as much as Stiles.

“So,” he begins. He has the undivided attention of every biped in the room “This is Stiles’ animal form. He’s a fennec fox.”

Scott chokes on nothing and begins wheezing, one hand lifted in an unclear, limp-wristed gesture at his friend.

“He’s a shapeshifter now,” Derek clarifies. It’s not too hard to take a stab at predicting Scott’s intended question.

Scott continues to wheeze, and John turns slightly to glare at him. “Get your inhaler, Scott.”

The boy fumbles in a bookbag slung carelessly on the counter, pulling a red and white inhaler free and sucking down a couple puffs while holding his hand up, although there is no conversation for him to pause. “Who are you?” is the first thing he says when he can breathe again. The words are

accusatory, and come in a stringent gust, potent with the medication he'd just sucked down. He glares at Derek. "Why are you here? How do you know Stiles? And about the. This. *Fox thing* -"

Derek taps a quick, restless pattern on the table with the edge of his thumb, and it distracts Scott into momentary silence. "My name is Derek Hale-" he begins, at the same time John says, "Scott, he was kidnapped with Stiles and helped him to escape-"

Scott edges distrustfully around the table before plopping into an empty seat. He glowers at Derek, at the hand that's slipped inside his jacket to hold the pale, furry creature inside. It is easy to see the wheels grinding around in his head, trying to make sense of it all.

"While we were... captured... Stiles was bitten by a..." Derek pauses and looks at Allison, who stands alertly by the door, intent and focused, "an Alpha werewolf. For. Um. Reasons. And, something went wrong. Or, well. Differently, I suppose." He clears his throat. "Instead of a wolf, Stiles seems to transform into a fennec fox. We don't understand why, exactly. It's very rare."

Scott barks an incredulous, wordless sound. "*Rare???* Are you *fucking* with me? Werewolves aren't real!"

Derek flashes his eyes at Scott and growls softly, "Werewolves are real enough," he grits through elongated teeth. "And you just watched your friend transform."

Scott reels back, pushing himself away from the table with a screech of chair legs across tile.

Derek ignores the byplay. "This is *dangerous* information. You need to understand that, *Scott*. Stiles will be hunted for this. You can't tell anyone about it; it *must* stay a secret."

Scott scoffs at him, lip lifted in disdain, and turns to John. "Mr. Stilinski," he begins, recalcitrant and angry.

But John shakes his head and makes a slashing motion with his hand. "No. Scott. Derek is right. You *mustn't* tell anyone, or Stiles' life will be in more danger than it already is. There are... people out there... who hunt werewolves." Here, John looks over to Derek for confirmation. "Hunters. That's who kidnapped Stiles," (at this reveal, Allison startles hard, but immediately thereafter controls herself into stillness, throwing a quick glance at Derek), "and Derek. But I understand there's a network of them, and. Not only hunters, but. I don't know. Scientists? Government? It can't get out, Scott." He turns to Allison, face set into *Sheriff Authority Mode*™, and says, "I don't know who you are..."

Derek says, "Her name is Allison Argent, I already told you about her father. She and her family know about werewolves. They'll keep a secret: they've been keeping it for generations." He cannot help the menace seeping into his tone.

John snaps his head around to Derek at that, eyebrows lifted in honest surprise, "-what?"

Allison steps forward, a timid smile on her face. "Mr. Stilinski," she offers her hand, looking disarmingly ingenuous. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

Scott finally connects two and two. "What? You know each other??" He stares at Allison, betrayed. "You know this guy? You know about... *werewolves*?"

Allison grimaces and looks to Derek for help, not sure how much he wants to reveal. He appreciates the consideration, and nods his gratitude formally at her before continuing, this time talking to both John and Scott. "The Argent family and mine have known each other for many years. We're good." But he stares hard at Allison when he says that. She subtly holds her hands palms-up, nervously, both of them aware that the recent kidnapping needs to be explained to Derek's satisfaction, but Allison not really acquainted with any of the details.

"You... *knew about Stiles?* You—" Scott's disillusionment saturates his question.

Allison immediately shakes her head, turning her whole body to face him with a woefully sincere expression. "No! No, not at all, Scott. I swear. I've never. We've never heard of anything like this." She swallows. "And we certainly didn't know about Stiles.... ."

Stiles had crept in a circle along Derek's arm and his shoe-button nose leads the way, shining eyes peeking out at the conversation. He pushes forward a bit more, and his gigantic ears pop out of hiding as well, stiff and attentive, swiveled towards the girl. She blinks at him, and then smiles slowly. "Hi, Stiles," she says quietly. "I'm *really* sorry I scared you. I didn't mean to. I didn't know."

Stiles just blinks and opens his mouth a little, clearly scenting the air.

"You *reek* of wolfsbane," Derek explains. "The whole house smells of it now."

"Oh!" Allison looks around and then wipes her hands on her jeans, as if that would help. "I'm sorry. I was in the greenhouse before Scott called. I never thought—"

Derek interrupts her with a shrug and a shake of his head. "It's alright," he says. "Just. That's probably what set Stiles off. You smell like *hunter*, and that's hardly a good association for him."

Allison's eyes widen further as she absorbs the implications of that.

John leans forward on his crossed arms, pushing a cold coffee mug out of the way. He narrows his eyes at the girl. "What do you know about these other hunters? The ones who took Stiles?" He pauses and then adds, "And Derek. Is it. It must be a close community: *supernatural hunters*," he shakes his head in astonishment. "I can't believe I just said that. And to a *teenage girl*."

"Don't underestimate her," Derek mutters. One of Stiles' ears pivots back when he speaks, and Derek fingers it gently, waiting to see what Allison has to say.

She looks at Derek when she speaks. "We knew *nothing*, Derek. I swear. I mean, I'll ask Dad, of course. But usually any hunters in town check in with us, and we always let you know. You *know* that, right? It's in the treaty, and we. I mean, except for Kate - Me and my dad, though, we've always abided—"

Derek blinks at her, lets her flounder, waits for her to go on.

"I'll go home and tell him, okay. We'll find out who they are. And what they wanted."

John leans forward. "Have your father contact me, do you understand? I need to know what's going on, and not just because I'm the sheriff, but because my son is deeply involved. They - " He stops for a minute, and his hands clench into white-knuckled fists. Fury and anguish slough off around him, so turpentine and stinging that Derek has to blink his eyes. "They had Stiles for *sixteen*

days. And they.” He reaches across the table and palms Stiles’ head, rubbing his thumb between bright black eyes for a moment, tracing the white coloring above them that looks like eyebrows. “They *tortured* him. Both of them.” He gestures between Stiles and Derek and takes a shaky breath. “I have to find them. So tell your dad to call me immediately.”

Scott makes a wounded noise when John says the word *torture*, and hugs his arms around himself.

Allison soberly acquiesces. “Yes, sir, Mr. Stilinski. I’ll go do it now.” She looks at Derek, who tilts his head toward the door, mute permission to leave. “Okay. I’ll see you later, Scott.” She walks forward and slowly crouches, lays her hand on the table, about a foot away from Stiles. “I’m sorry I scared you, Stiles,” she says again, and then chews on her lip. “I. I’d like to get to know you better, some day soon. You know. When you can talk,” she smiles, obviously not realizing that Stiles is mute even when he’s human. Stiles creeps over far enough to sniff at the air near her hand. Black whiskers point towards it in a gentle parabola, and his nose wiggles as he snuffles. Derek lays a comforting hand along his back as Stiles sits back on his haunches, looking up at the girl. “Okay then,” she laughs a little. “And, Scott -”

“I’ll walk you out,” Scott says, eyes glued on Stiles. He shakes his head, clearly still disgruntled and confused and heartbroken.

John sighs and stands up, tiredly rubbing the back of his neck. “Why don’t you head on home, too, son. We’ve all got a lot to think about. Just,” he pulls the boy in for a tight embrace and then levers him back, a firm hand on each shoulder, “just be sure not to tell anybody about this. *No one.*”

Scott nods, and John ruffles his hand through Scott’s hair, pushing his bookbag at his chest. “Get on out of here. I’ll let you know when, well, when I know anything.”

Scott’s mouth pulls down, more with genuine worry and remorse than self-aggrivement, and he approaches the table. “Bye Stiles.” He crouches until he and the tiny fox are eye to eye. “Sorry.” The pair stare at one another for a long moment before Scott breaks into a grin. “Dude. You’re, like, an animagus!”

Stiles responds with a nose to nose bump and a very short, painfully strident shriek, which has Scott falling back and laughing. He stands up, then, “See you soon, Mr. Stilinski.” He looks at Derek and nods his head, but the motion is short. Clearly Derek is still on his shit list.

Derek watches him hold the door for Allison and leave without comment.

“Come here, son,” John says, as the door shuts behind them. Stiles kind of skitters sideways until he’s in front of his father. John smiles at the cold touch of his nose. “Always making waves, aren’t you,” he muses under his breath, then adds with a heavy sigh, “and making things more complicated.”

He purses his mouth, running his tongue over his teeth. He smells of coffee and fatigue. The rims of his eyes are drooping and reddened, and Derek can sympathize with that state. “You haven’t told me the whole story,” John eventually says, gaze fixed on Derek and no less piercing for being exhausted.

Derek shrugs, unrepentant. “There’s a lot I can’t tell you,” he says, “and a lot that doesn’t seem relevant, until it is. Like I said before, my family has... *had...* a long history with the Argents. They’re honorable, for hunters. They live by a Code: basically, they hunt only those werewolves

who are dangerous and a threat to humans. Which my family has never been. Eliminating rogue werewolves is a goal we share, as a matter of fact. We've had a treaty for a long time, each family dedicated to protecting this town from all types of supernatural threats."

Eliminating, John mouths, disbelieving, but doesn't interrupt.

Stiles begins licking at his paws, but his ears stay attentively pointed in Derek's direction as he continues. Derek's heart beats faster, in anticipation of the next thing he needs to say. It's not something he can control. His palms grow hot and damp. He spreads his fingers wide, pressing them down on the table, making two half-circle fans. "Chris's sister Kate." He stops a minute, and stares at his fingers as if they're about to do something. Stiles makes an inquiring, worried chirp and sidles over, licking at his knuckles and staring up at him.

Derek forces himself to relax, strokes Stiles' feather-soft tail for comfort. "Kate and her father abandoned the Code. They... slaughtered my family." He stares into the glinting sloe of Stiles' eyes, where his reflection swims. His face is twisted and strained, so he shuts his eyes to block it out. On the other side of the table, John gasps, straightening up with a loud rustle of his canvas jacket. Derek hurries to finish. "Chris dealt with them, after. It took a while, but we reaffirmed the treaty. I'm. Pretty sure I trust them."

"Jesus," John breathes. "Jesus. Derek."

Derek *knows* that John knows about his family. About the fire that had killed everyone but him, ten years earlier. John had worked the scene; he remembers the man's face, slipping through the haze of trauma and grief, as he struggled to get through the barrier around the smoldering ruin of his home. Remembers the man's hands around his shoulders, low voice murmuring unimportant, soothing things.

Stiles lifts onto his rear paws, standing supported on Derek's chest and strains to reach his chin, tongue busy, laving his sympathy and support on the scruff of his check. Derek shakes off the memories, as he's learned to do over the years, and leans back, scooping Stiles to come with him, holding him high on his chest. "So, yeah. Fairly sure I trust them," he says, "and they're our next best lead, since we haven't been able to trace Laxmi and Baron. It can only be helpful to have them check their network."

While John scrubs his face with his hands, Derek cracks his neck, dropping his head from shoulder to shoulder in a quick movement. The pop of shifting ligaments is loud in the room. He lowers his chin and stares at Stiles, who attentively watches him in return. "You need to change back, Stiles," he says firmly, glad to leave the topic. "You can't just transform whenever you're startled. This has to stay a secret. It's *literally* a matter of life and death."

John blows out a sudden breath. "Oh, god," he says, "*school*. What are we going to do about school?"

Derek rises, pushing his chair back with a grating scrape. "Let's get him back to human, first. I'll take him upstairs." He waits to see if John will protest, curious to find out if their argument from last night has progressed. The promised talk that was supposed to happen when John got off work appears to have been scuttled by Stiles' unexpected shift.

John makes an aborted movement before sitting back and pinching the bridge of his nose. He glances over at the clock and sighs. "I'm in over my head," he mutters to himself before looking back at Derek. "I'm gonna go get a pizza," he says, and then shuts his eyes for a long moment.

“Be back in an hour.” He says nothing further, but tips his head towards the stairs, and that’s all the permission Derek needs.



Chapter End Notes

I find it much easier to read outside my fandom than to read outside my OTP, does that make me weird? Like, I totally floundered my way through Attack On Titan fics, knowing absolutely zero about what the show was about (and boy was that bewildering) rather than delve into Sciles.

Also, I just encountered another fennec fox Stiles fic (while cruising for ‘feral’, which was unexpected), which is totally hilarious (you MUST watch the video first, and beware, because it is very loud). Anyway, it’s short and I giggled my way through it, so y’all will, too: [Little pitchers have big ears!](#) by [wanderseeing](#). While I was in feral, I read my all-time favorite feral!Derek, which is [Lock All The Doors Behind You](#) by [entanglednow](#), and also this one: [Wolf in the House](#) by [JoeLawson](#), which is sweet and tragically funny. Actually, there are so many feral Derek (and Stiles) fics, here, have at [my feral bookmarks!](#) (You’re welcome.) And for next week, “accidental baby acquisition”, a tag that makes me laugh for half a day, just because it is a thing that exists.

Interlude

Chapter Notes

There be art! Y'all, I'm a doofus and totally forgot to put up [StephCaroline's amazing cover graphic](#) last week, so please take a moment to enjoy the awesomeness. (And then go heart and reblog, if you're on tumblr.) You're a wonder, my dear, I'm so honored and I think it's simply lovely!

Also, [themuller13](#) figured she hadn't done enough, bless her heart, and made [a new graphic](#) just for the last chapter. I'll move it to its proper place next week, but meanwhile, it's at the bottom of this chapter, just to be sure you can all see it. Let her know how much you love it in reblogs and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Upstairs in Stiles' room, Derek sets the tiny fox on the floor next to the bed and then stands, staring down at him. "Shift," he commands. There is an edge of Dom in his voice: the preceding hour has been stressful and upsetting, leaving him feeling unsettled and powerless and jittery with an intense need to dominate and control.

Evidently Stiles is feeling the same way, because he shifts without argument or sass, after a pause as if he needs to figure out *how*. His form blurs and stretches, with the soft grinding pops of bone and muscle rearranging and lengthening. And then there is a slim boy sprawled at Derek's feet, naked and vulnerable. He lifts his head, to examine Derek's face with enchanting, lucent brown eyes before dropping it shyly again. He starts picking at his thumb with the finger next to it, and Derek gently puts his shoe over the hand to still the motion.

"I want you to kneel. Hands behind your back. Eyes on the ground." He takes a deep breath, watching as Stiles moves silently, arranging himself to Derek's specifications. Because Stiles can't speak, Derek relies on cues from his body and his scent to guide him, to let him know if Stiles is alright with what's happening. Right now his heart is quick, but no more so than it usually is, a light, tripping background patter. The mordant funk of fear and adrenaline is fading, rather than fresh. Instead, the bouquet that wafts from Stiles is an alluring combination of *gratitude* and *submission and need*.

Derek's breath gushes out in a sharp chuff as a familiar tension ratchets his body. He feels larger. Stronger. Control is a web he can weave between his spread fingers; it vibrates in a skim over his body. His eyes flash red as he circles Stiles.

The winter sun is setting, even though it's barely five o'clock. Stiles' westward-facing window is rich with sharply slanted light, dust motes sparkle in the lowering sunbeam as it crosses the room to settle on Stiles' skin like the loving pass of an artist's brush. Stiles goes briefly gray as Derek passes between him and the window, but becomes luminous again when he steps out of the way.

"You are so beautiful," he praises, just to watch the sub shiver with pleasure. He palms the back of Stiles' skull, inclining his head down further, just because he can, before tracing along gold-limned skin, touching the random pattern of flat little moles that twist along the sweet curve of neck and drift towards a sculpted shoulder blade. He pauses to press his finger into each raised vertebrae, soaking in the sound of Stiles' soft little sighs.

After a couple of circuits, Derek kneels behind Stiles, hands on his shoulders, and begins to mold him into a more evocative pose. "Shhh," he whispers, not paying attention to what he says, surfing the pheromones of his dominance. "My beauty. Let me move you..."

And Stiles does, fluid and responsive to Derek's touch. With small adjustments of Derek's guiding fingers and palms, Stiles is directed into a taller stance, Derek increases the sway at the small of his back to emphasize the rounded swell of his ass. He lengthens Stiles spine by running his hands up the sharply ridged ribs along his sides, pulling as he goes, Stiles flowing under his hands, breaths deep and calm. Derek slopes Stiles' shoulders down and forward, bends his head until his chin nearly touches the prominent knobs of his clavicles. Arches the shoulder blades until they jut with the salience of wings. With a firm touch to the insides of Stiles' feet, he widens the empty space under his ass and then curves his hand underneath to barely brush the swinging testicles that hide in the shadows there.

Stiles gasps at that touch, and the aromatic flood of his desire coats the inside of Derek's nose, thick and clinging, earthy and deep. "So good," Derek rasps. "So beautiful. Baby boy. Look at you." He strokes down Stiles' arms, the endless length of them, arranges the elbows into a softer curve, straightens Stiles' fingers with his own before placing one over the other in a gentle clasp at the small of his back.

Derek breathes through his open mouth, dragging air across his tongue and up over the specialized sensory organ at the base of his nasal passages that is primarily made up of pheromone receptors. *Fuck*, but Stiles smells delectable. Blood races to his cock, surging with the fire of conquest, distracting him with the throb and pulse of its passage. Derek groans, and Stiles shudders, a whispered mewl emitted as he sinks into his new posture, rolls his heels outward to widen his stance even more, and another wave of musk and pheromones rises to wrap around them in an intoxicating cloud.

Derek shuffles closer, opening his knees to keep Stiles in the *V* of them, staring down at the line of his spine, gripping hipbones made curvy from Stiles' pose of *presentation* before slipping under the globes of his ass to glide teasingly across supple skin and then dip in to where hair begins, thick and prickly, to protect Stiles' most vulnerable places. Stiles jerks a little against his chest, and Derek drops his head to bite the join of neck and shoulder, holding tight: a warning with blunted teeth. He bears down enough to leave a slight dental pattern when he draws back. "Don't. Move."

Instinctively, Stiles rolls his head to the side, exposing his neck to his Dom, and Derek growls his approval, sucking lightly at it as he looks over Stiles' shoulder down the flat plane of his chest.

Stiles' cock has risen, red and gleaming between his opened thighs, and Derek breathes in again, the heady aroma of arousal and anticipation. He touches Stiles' chest, hands spread wide across the ropey ridge of pectorals, and fingers two peaked nipples, small and hard and cast in shadow, while the last of the sun is warm on Derek's back, and Derek's body warms Stiles.

Derek glances at the clock. It's only been ten minutes, which means they have plenty of time before John returns. He scoots up against Stiles, solid against his back, firm along the outsides of his thighs. He holds Stiles hip with one hand, mouths at his neck, craning to see as he slowly works Stiles nipple to a plumper, more swollen point. With a small, *ungh*, Stiles leans back against him, and Derek avidly watches the sub's cock bob in response to his pulling, pinching fingers.

"Yes," he mutters his encouragement. "Very good. My good boy. I want you to let go, to give it to me. Look at me."

Stiles rolls his head to gaze up, hazy and flushed, mouth dropped open and wet. "Yes," Derek hisses. "So good. Let me have you." And he leans in to kiss, sucking Stiles' lips into his own, one after the other, pulling the unbearable sweetness of his acquiescence into his own mouth and remaking it into something honeyed and hot. He rises off his heels again, unthinking, buoyed by the rising power of his dominion. He relinquishes Stiles' chest to grip him under his jaw, keeping his head tilted back, off balance and open, licking back as Derek plunges his tongue inside again and again, feeling the drag of Stiles smooth shoulders through the hairs on his chest. He pulls the boy's chin higher, rising up more until Stiles is off his heels as well, arched and unbalanced, a tautly bowed line from the knees up. Derek's cock strains through denim against the the exaggerated curve above Stiles' ass, and Stiles' soft whimper adds a succulent dimension to their scene.

Someone is growling. Derek hears it dimly, not registering that it's coming from him. He leans further back, hovers, balanced solely on the strength of his thighs, the tension of his core. The energy of holding this position, of forcing Stiles to stretch backward, of his dependency on Derek's strength to hold him up, that is a drug that makes his heart beat faster, makes fire burn under his skin, spark along his nerves in a chain reaction that leaps from fingertip to chest to cock.

Holding tightly to Stiles jaw, he traces the tightened span of his belly, curls his fingers into the scrub of hair at the base of Stiles' jutting cock, framed perfectly between spread knees. A flush rises on Stiles cheeks, sinks across his shoulders, colors skin halfway down his chest, and his erection visibly bobs with each resounding thud of his heart.

"Just like this," Derek says, carding through pubic curls, teasing and demanding, letting the sides of his fingers brush against the thin skin of Stiles' straining cock. "Don't move, my beauty. Stay like this for me. I know you can."

And Stiles gives a stuttered little nod that Derek catches in the web of thumb and forefinger, hard against the underside of his jaw. "Very good, then." He releases his grip and Stiles doesn't move, keeping the tight, torqued line of his body, just as Derek had arranged him, arced sharply back, braced against Derek's shoulder and his own knees to hold the line.

Derek growls and bites at his neck again, the wolf pleased with this obedience, with the evidence of such effort on the part of his mate. He needs to *mark*, but holds himself back, because he doesn't know yet if that's something Stiles would consent to. And he certainly doesn't want to leave John evidence of what they've been doing. Instead he traces the bow of Stiles' lips, drags against the soft skin there, dips his fingers in to be wetted against Stiles' tongue, the flexing walls of his

cheeks, the slowly growing pool of saliva growing under his tongue. “Don’t close your mouth,” he whispers, dragging his scruff against Stiles’ temple. “Don’t move.”

And Stiles doesn’t, lets Derek dampen his fingers inside his mouth, and only trembles and sighs. His eyes are closed, and Derek looks at the charcoal smudge of long, thick lashes, reaching halfway to the crest of his cheekbone, the saucy uptilt of his nose pointed right at the ceiling. The soft *O* of his open mouth is broken only by the gentle stroking of Derek’s own fingers, a motion that he echos on the boy’s cock with his other hand, soft and loosely wrapped.

“That’s it, baby,” he croons. “I want you relaxed.”

That’s rather an impossible command, unless he wants Stiles to collapse back onto his heels. But Stiles gets it, relaxes all his muscles except for those core ones keeping him bowed backwards, lets much of his weight press through his head on Derek’s shoulder. His heart has slowed further, lips softened against the base of Derek’s thumb, eyes half-closed and unfocused. Derek can see the boy slipping down, dropping into subspace without a ripple. “Perfect,” he says, more to himself than to Stiles. “You are perfect.”

Derek waits for several long breaths, mouth open around Stiles’ neck, nose buried in the hollow under his jaw. Then he drops his wetted fingers to Stiles’ coccyx, skimming in a deliberate path down the meridian of Stiles’ ass. “Is this okay?” he whispers, reminding himself about *caution*, and *triggers*.

Stiles rolls his head a little, eyelids shuddering as they close. He doesn’t tense up, but rather deliberately pushes back a little harder, and Derek smiles, feral and wolfish and satisfied. “Yes,” he murmurs, and slides his fingers sweetly between pert cheeks, unashamedly landing on the raised pucker of Stiles’ hole. He rubs there, circles and nudges, uses three wandering fingers to claim that sacred space, to own the rim and the hole and the hairs and the irregularities of skin that surround them. His hand tightens on Stiles’ cock, finally stroking him properly.

“Do you want my fingers inside you?” he breathes into Stiles ear, and the boy shudders and moans. Derek waits until he nods before he reaches into the nightstand (so conveniently close that he scarcely has to stretch) and rummages around without looking until he comes up with a sticky tube of lubricant. Stiles makes a mortified little whine, which Derek interprets as, *What the fuck man, how did you know that was there? Did you smell it? Omg, I’m gonna die of embarrassment* and he snorts a laugh behind Stiles’ ear as he unscrews the cap and slicks up his fingers with one hand.

The furl of skin he caresses is still relaxed from his earlier ministrations, and Derek easily pushes two fingers inside the boy. He groans as he does so. Stiles is hot, and clinging, and invitingly slippery inside. The chokehold of his outer muscle pinches at Derek’s third knuckles while he probes velvet soft tissue with his fingertips, seeking the smooth mound of Stiles’ prostate, and then slowly stimulating it into prominence. Derek controls the sub with the mastery of a skilled musician, working his instrument with dexterity and passion and an intimate knowledge.

Stiles trembles against him, growing more tense, thighs shaking and panting little breaths that puff against Derek’s neck. “Do you want to come, sweet boy?” He gets a dazed affirmative hum in response, and tightens his hand around Stiles’ cock.

“Are you mine?” He doesn’t know where that question comes from, and he is nearly jolted out of domspace in his surprise. He blinks and frowns momentarily. It must have to do with John. With the need to contest another Dom for the favors of a mutually sought sub. John isn’t a wolf, isn’t an Alpha; he can’t respond to, or even *sense*, the cues that compel Derek. From the uncomplicated

perspective of the wolf, Stiles belongs to *Derek*. He was won through blood and fear and anguish; a dynamic later solidified through care and trust. John wasn't there, in that dank basement, and his claim is riddled with faults because of it.

Sadly, Derek can't behave as the wolf dictates, because John is the *father of his mate*. He shouldn't be alienated. They must give an appearance of cooperation, at a minimum. By creating or indulging in conflict with John, Derek could potentially further heap pain or uncertainty on the boy currently impaled on his fingers. He freezes.

But Stiles nods without hesitation, doesn't give Derek any time to dwell; nods *I am yours* and his eyes flash limpid, the shining, all-encompassing black of his fennec fox form. He jerks his hips backwards in a sassy reminder that makes Derek relax and almost smile. "Alright, then," Derek says, and applies himself to bringing his sub satisfaction. It doesn't take more than a couple of minutes before Stiles shakes apart, a rough cry rattling his chest as he flinches and flexes, muscles contracting in waves as orgasm overtakes him. Semen drips over Derek's knuckles, as hot as the fleshy grip of Stiles' ass.

Derek has to pull his hands free much too quickly, catching the boy as he collapses, guiding him back down to his knees, folding him over so that his head can rest on his crossed arms. Derek only waits long enough to be sure Stiles is comfortable before he leans in on one hand, gasps, "Stiles, can I—" into the salty skin of his nape. Stiles hums and gives a sleepy little shimmy of encouragement. Derek pulls down his jeans and underpants with more eagerness than ceremony, groaning with relief as his erection springs free. He braces on one arm over Stiles and strips himself hard and fast, head dropped to stare at his flashing hand, the peeping head of his cock, and the enticing curve of Stiles' back, pale skin sporadically jolting with aftershocks.

With a barked shout, Derek releases, in every way, spurts of come jetting out along with tension and worry and frustration. He expels it all from his body, violent and rigid, heaving like bellows and working hard, feeling high with relief and endorphins, watching his seed stripe over Stiles. He reaches around to scoop the glutinous stuff from Stiles' belly and mixes it together with his own, rubbing the slurry mess into Stiles' skin, and, possessively, through his crack and across his still-twitching anus. He pushes a little inside with the tip of his forefinger, shuddering at the thought of his come marking that most intimate space.

When it is done, he hangs there, supporting arm tremoring with nascent collapse, breathing in the scents that surround them, using his free hand to swirl together their release, scooping a bit on the side of his finger to taste before rolling the sub onto his back and offering it to Stiles, whose mouth opens trustingly, like a bird, willing and eager.

"You're so good for me," Derek mumbles, and clumsily, one-handed, pulls up his pants before dropping to both elbows over Stiles, languidly scenting him, enjoying the catch and drag of skin and stubble as he breathes in sweat and repletion. "So good. You're mine. You know it now, right? Mine. Stiles. You belong with me."

Stiles is silent, of course, but lifts noodly arms to link them around Derek's neck, pulling him down into a strong embrace, which is affirmation enough.

They both rest for a few moments, catching their breath and soaking up the heat of the other's skin as the sunlight has vanished and left a chill in its wake.

But John will be home soon. So Derek gets up to fetch a washcloth, cleaning them both with regret, caught up in Stiles' body and Stiles' eyes and Stiles' smell, unwilling to examine his

reluctance to cover it up, to become conventionally human and rule-bound once again.

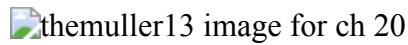
Derek tosses the washcloth in the corner of the room, a distant part of his mind noting that John better not see it or he'd know what happened in more detail than he'd want to, and tugs his pants back up. Stiles stares up at him with dreamy expression, clearly relaxed and sated and at ease. Derek smiles and rubs his thumb across the silky divot of Stiles' temple, brushing away cooling sweat and stirring up a soft wave of their combined scents. Derek breathes it in for an indulgent moment, eyes closed.

"Are you tired?" he murmurs.

Stiles gives an open-mouthed smile, like he's stoned. Derek scoops him up without asking further, rising effortlessly to his feet. He easily balances Stiles' weight, holding him draped over both forearms. Stiles is loose in his arms, rests his head trustingly against Derek's shoulder as he takes the few steps to Stiles' bed.

Once the boy is settled on the mattress, with the blanket pulled up under his chin, Derek sinks down next to him, fingers tracing patterns in the shorn field of his hair. He draws out the dull ache that yet hovers around Stiles' healing throat, and gets a slight twitch of a smile in response. Derek can't stop touching him, stroking softly over hair and jaw, shoulders and arms, over and over, caught in the same sated, dreamy, post-scene state that affects Stiles. He doesn't realize that he's humming under his breath, a more human counterpart to Stiles' contented purr.

By the time the door downstairs snicks closed, that and a waft of grease and melted cheese announcing John's return, Stiles is deeply asleep.



Chapter End Notes

There we are, just some pure porn for you, my dears. It's kind of a short chapter, sorry, but this was a good stopping point. (Next up, FINALLY, the conversation John and Derek have been needing to have for so long.)

Now, did I promise some #AccidentalBabyAcquisition recs last time?

- My very favorite of all time is without question [**I Know Where Babies Come From, Derek**](#) by [DiscontentedWinter](#). I've read it at least four times, it's a weird comfort fic of mine (weird because it isn't slow paced or domestic at *all*.) It's gorgeous and funny and really unique for the genre... and will also rip your heart out. (I never read it without bawling until my poor eyes are swollen at that part in the middle... but don't you worry, peeps, it has a happy ending: you walk away feeling really good.)
- Then there's [**What to expect when you aren't expecting**](#) by [MemeKon](#), which is short and sweet.
- You'll also want to read [**Open the Door**](#) by [TatsuKitty](#) with the little elven infant Lorelei;

- and [**omnis cellula e cellula**](#) by [twnkwlf](#) is a great story, starting out with a gruesome sacrifice on the Nematot and an abandoned newborn.
- And finally, there is [**Dragon Verse**](#) by [lupinus](#), which was my first in this tag, and I love it because a dragon just randomly makes a baby for Stiles and Derek. As they do.

If you're looking for other recs that feature less fluff and more kidnapping and violence and h/c (of course you are: since you're reading this, that's obviously right up your alley), [**this post**](#) ("sterek fan fictions where stiles is either held captive or simply hurt or in danger and Derek has to save him?") was brought to my attention by [faedreamer](#), who recced this story on it (thank you, darling!) and then I might have gotten carried away and searched my whump tag and added a whole lot more.

Hopefully these will keep you busy for the long, *loonnnnggg*, interminable fortnight until the next update. (I'm looking at you, BlueSkyMournings.)

A Serious Talk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Derek checks himself over carefully in Stiles' mirror before going downstairs, determined that he not display evidence, in either clothes or bearing, of what happened while John was gone. He plans to start this potentially (probably) very unpleasant conversation with as many advantages as he can.

John is in the kitchen, arranging a couple pizza boxes on the table and getting plates out of the cabinet. Derek clears his throat at the door, alerting John to his presence, and then gestures vaguely upstairs. "Stiles is asleep," he says, and shrugs. "I don't know for how long...."

John purses his lips and puts the third plate back with a sharp clatter. Fatigue and stress radiate from him in a sharp, turpentine roil, making Derek wrinkle his nose before he consciously clears his expression again. He waits to see what John will say.

"Is he still a fox?"

Derek shakes his head, jams his hands in his pockets. "No. He shifted back once he'd calmed down."

"Alright, son," John says after a moment's thought. He turns and grabs two bottles from the refrigerator. "We'll start without him. We need to talk anyway."

Derek accepts the beer and the implied truce, sitting at the table and popping the cap off with a claw, which makes John's eyebrows lift and a surprised smile flicker before it's suppressed. Derek can see Stiles in that reaction, the pleasure at something new and unexpected, and it helps the tightly clenched muscles in his arms and chest loosen, less prepared for fight or flight. They are going to resolve this tension between them, this onerous tug-of-war over a treasured sub. They *have* to. Stiles is depending on the two of them to sort themselves out, and so they must. It's as simple as that.

For a moment, they avoid conversation, loading up their plates with pizza, and Derek waits for John to start, since he is technically Alpha in his own house.

"I don't like what you're doing with my son." John says bluntly, initiating the dreaded conversation. "I don't like feeling like you're crossing my boundaries whenever my back is turned. I. I can admit that it's unfair, but that doesn't change how I feel. I don't understand your relationship, although I'm aware that being in such a... an intense situation ... together must have forged strong bonds." He stares at Derek for a moment, eyes hard and determined, every inch an authority figure, which is in contrast to the cooling slice of pizza drooping from his hand. Derek waits for more.

"Stiles is barely sixteen. He. He hasn't had a lot of experience with *any* relationships outside of me and the McCalls." He finishes his slice and wipes his fingers on a paper napkin, giving himself a minute. "Finding you in his bed last night was—" Derek can hear him grinding his teeth, "was upsetting, to say the least. You might not see it this way, but you're taking advantage of him. He's a *child*, Hale, and I want you to step back." John slumps into his chair and swallows half his beer in one motion. It's clearly Derek's turn.

"He's not a child anymore," Derek begins. "No one could be, after what he's been through." There's an extended pause, wherein both of them, Derek is sure, are thinking about what had happened to Derek at this same age. "I know you saw that video, so you have to have a pretty good picture of what was happening." His eyebrows furrow, expressing his wretchedness that he couldn't stop any of that misuse of the boy. He shakes his head and sucks in a breath. "He's part of my pack, now, which means I have a responsibility towards him that can't just be dismissed. And before you start," he adds, when John stiffens and leans forward, "I didn't make that choice for him. He did it on his own, although he had no idea what kind of... commitment... he was making. It's *done*, now, and there's no backing out. He cannot be *un-bit*, do you understand?"

John huffs *No* under his breath, but doesn't make an issue of it.

"When I- When Stiles got the bite, he initiated a pack bond." Derek taps at his chest, over his heart and looks a little imploringly at John. "I can feel him here. I mean, literally. I feel his anguish and his fear and his pain. And I *have* to take care of it." He swallows hard, because this is the crux of it, the heart of the conflict between the two men. "I know that was your place, before, sir. But now we're bound, Stiles and I. Not as Dom and sub," which is fudging the truth if not an outright lie, but Derek doesn't want to alienate John right away, "but as part of the Pack network. He needs me, as I need him. It's chemical and solid and *real*, even though you can't see it. It's not some PTSD thing that we can make go away with a little therapy: it's physical and it's permanent."

John starts on another piece of pizza, frowning and contentious, but holding his tongue, for which Derek is grateful.

"When I first saw Stiles last night, he was a *mess*. He's been traumatized for weeks, his entire environment just changed, and, I don't know, you and I have both been gone a lot over the past week and he was stuck here all alone, without pack or family, and caught in an unfamiliar body to boot. It's not really surprising that he was agitated and angry and stressed and afraid."

Derek looks down at the remains of his pizza on the plate, and lines up the crusts into a row of parentheses. "He needed to be dropped before he devolved into a panic attack. He was deliberately *goading* me into dropping him. He-" Derek stops and takes a deep breath, because he doesn't think John knows about this part; it's going to be painful to recount, and will no doubt be more harrowing by far to hear about your beloved son.

"The hunters who had us were all Doms. Powerful ones. Stiles is a very strong sub, he's amazing, I've never met one as strong as he is. But, he was dropped against his will *every day*. The two that were, um, dead in the cabin when you and I got there, they would team up and dual-Dom him. It was the only way they could... drop him."

Derek deliberately doesn't say *put him on his knees*, because the phrase is fraught with imagery that Stiles' father doesn't need, and is a little too close to the truth. But John makes a wounded sound, regardless, and his eyes blaze with impotent fury and tears both. The lines on his face look starker now, etched with borrowed tragedy.

Derek doesn't want to continue, both for John's sake and also Stiles', but it's necessary to make John to understand, in spite of the fact that it makes his skin crawl. "He was in subspace for *hours and hours*. Every day, John. Forced to follow orders and commands that he tried to resist, that were fundamentally things he didn't want to do, and then they'd just... dump him back in the cell." He presses both hands flat to the slightly sticky tabletop and stares at the Sheriff, willing him to understand the situation. "They did that for who knows how long before I even got there. The very

first time I saw him Stiles, he was deep in subdrop, reeking of fear and misery. I had to establish a connection, for both of our sakes. I tried not to, but. I *couldn't leave him like that*. He required care, and he still does, and I can't ignore it. I can't."

"Well, now that he's home, *I can care for him again*," John says stubbornly. "You don't *need*," Derek can hear the sarcastic air quotes around that word, "to fill in as his Dom anymore."

Derek stifles a growl of frustration and recognizes that he needs to switch tactics. A neighbor drags his trash bin in, and the rattle of its wheels along the concrete is singularly invasive in the uncomfortably quiet kitchen. Derek clamps his tongue between his teeth and looks at the kitchen window. It's gone dark already, this late in the year, but even now there are insects clustering around the bare bulb outside. If he concentrates, he can almost hear the tiny *plink* as they crash into the warm glass, over and again, and he wonders how loud that would sound for Stiles. He stares out at the dark and tries to calm his heart: ranting and roaring will not help him, here. Ripping out John's throat and howling *I am Stiles' Dom* isn't exactly his end goal, although his wolf says otherwise. He needs to play at being civilized. "Have you dropped Stiles since he returned?" he asks.

John frowns and after a short pause, shakes his head. "He's been an animal!" he protests.

Derek exhales slowly, releasing air in a controlled stream through pursed lips, holding his temper in check. "He's not *an animal*. He's *Stiles*, no matter what form he wears. He's been hanging on by a thread. He's a sub: he needs safety and boundaries and intense and focused care, and it has to be from someone he has complete faith in. Right now, that's me. He's *suffering*, John. His mind knows that you're a trusted figure, but his body is confused and scared and new... and utterly out of his control. He's dealing with instincts he didn't have before, on top of everything else."

"So what you're saying here is that you *have* established a D/s bond with my son," John says, voice tight and angry.

Derek stands up, slapping his hands on the table, furious but trying to control his reflexive urge to lash out. "Yes! I'm saying that if I *hadn't* (and I tried not to!) he'd be *out of his mind* right now. His *survival* depended on forming a bond. I've never seen a sub so desperate or needy. Of *course* I couldn't deny him. Sir. And you wouldn't have wanted me to. After the abuse he endured all day, *every day*, he needed a safe place to go, and I was his only possible refuge." Derek's leaving out half the story, of course. Not mentioning how much *he* had needed *Stiles*, not describing how the potential for a bond had sung in his blood before he even knew Stiles or what the sub was going through. Not telling John how avidly he'd desired that connection: it was not a mere altruistic gesture on Derek's part.

John surges to his own feet, fists clenched, but still down by his sides. "Fine. But now he has *his father* again--"

Derek growls and his eyes flare red. "Yeah. *His father*, who just called him an *animal* and assumed that his needs as a sub *cease* when he's wearing fur." He stops himself before he goes too far, closing his eyes and counting to, whatever, counting something, pretending to count, in his head. He doesn't want to anger John, he reminds himself. Just wants to make him understand. He scrubs a hand over his face, and when he opens his eyes again, they're clear and green. John smells a little bit of fear, a lot of anger, but the expression on his face is dawning, albeit reluctant, acceptance.

Derek sits down again, relieved when John follows suit. “Stiles is a werewolf now. Becoming one was his *own* choice. If I’d been in a position to make that decision, I’d have refused it. Not least because there was the possibility that he’d die instead of accept the bite.” John looks intensely curious at this tidbit, both sandy eyebrows drawn high, but Derek hurries on, not yet willing to discuss the details of that particular scene.

“Werewolves have. We’re different from humans, of course. And one of those differences is that we’re pack animals. We form much more intense and physical bonds with one another, all the members of the pack. And we crave a physical connection as well. We use touch for reassurance, for play, to communicate our emotions. Stiles. You can’t treat him as a simple human anymore, John. He’s. Think of him as touch-starved, okay? Skin hungry but too afraid to trust anyone to touch him. Those conflicting needs are tearing him up right now. Especially when you combine that with his inability to speak, right. He feels trapped. And I think. I think you’re a good father, and I know you want what’s best for your son. He’s a pack animal, now. He needs his pack. And you’re *part of that*, but you’re confusing and upsetting him by countering what I say and do.”

John tips his head forward and drops it into his hands. He’s silent and still, and Derek waits for a minute before uncomfortably rising and putting away the pizza, stacking the plates and setting them in the sink. Eventually he just stands there, leaning on the counter, waiting for John to assimilate the information, or whatever he’s doing. The waxy smell of grief swells and then diminishes before he finally lifts his head again to face Derek.

“So.” John’s voice is a little cracked and dry. “Help me understand. Tell me about. Werewolf packs.”

Derek’s body almost *melts* in relief, so intense he nearly cracks a smile. He opens the fridge to get another beer and hands it to John before sitting back down. He tells John about pack hierarchy: the Alpha pair, the betas, omegas and rogues. John knows enough about the Hale family that Derek can mention Alpha Talia, also a Dom, and his father’s sub status (thus obliquely impressing upon John, hopefully, his innate respect for and understanding of male subs). He explains how, when his family died, all eleven of them in one devastating afternoon, the Alpha status had passed to Derek.

“Who is in your pack now?” John asks.

“I have three betas,” he answers. “Boyd, Erica and Isaac.”

John’s lack of reaction reveals that those names mean nothing to him. “And you can... *feel* them?”

Derek touches his chest, mentally tracing the faint lines that connect him to each wolf. He smiles a little. “Erica and Boyd are fine. Probably making dinner or doing homework. Isaac is worried,” his brow furrows. “I should call and let him know that Stiles is okay. I ran out of there pretty fast and didn’t really explain....”

“Wait. So you could feel Stiles before I called?” John’s eyes narrow, and his focus is targeted and honed.

Feeling like he’s under official interrogation, Derek nods. “I could feel that he was panicking and confused, but I didn’t know why.”

John stares at him for a while, sucking on his teeth as he thinks. He gives a sharp nod of his head, as though filing something important away for later, before returning to his earlier point, “And the,

er, orientations of these betas. Are they all Dom, like you? How do dynamics work in a pack?"

Derek shakes his head. "Erica is neutral and Boyd is a Dom, but since I'm the Alpha, they still submit to me. Isaac is... neutral, too."

John doesn't seem to notice Derek's hesitation over Isaac's orientation. A small muscle pops in his jaw. "So Stiles would be the. What. The *pack sub*?"

Derek growls, loud and menacing, he can't suppress his need to defend his pack and his sub and his *dignity*. "Are you... *No!* There is no such thing as a *pack sub*. I don't even want to know what's going through your mind. Stiles will be a respected and cherished member of the pack or I'll deal with it. He'll submit to *no one* but me, and I'll rip apart anyone who tries to force him."

John says, "What about, um, pecking order. Isn't that a pack thing? I mean." He stops and swallows, and Derek can read in his face and twisting hands that he still thinks that Stiles would be the bottommost and least respected, least valued member of the pack.

Derek leans against the sink and crosses his arms, frustrated with how he has to pick through a minefield to answer each of John's questions so as not to freak him out too badly. (The man *is*, after all, an officer of the law, wearing a uniform and badge and packing a weapon.) The short answer, of course, is that Stiles is his *mate*, and as such, would absolutely be the top of any pack hierarchy next to Derek himself. He clumsily tries to dodge and deflect. "Stiles wouldn't be a beta. Because. He'd. Um. He comes into the pack attached to me, so. Um. He'd be outside the beta's hierarchy. They will listen to him and give him respect, *always*. Not just because I say so, but because they'll *want to*. His sub status and his... nascent... within the pack won't have anything to do with it."

John looks at him shrewdly, and it's clear that Derek has done a poor job of obfuscating the question. "Because he'd be *your sub*," John says, summarizing everything Derek had tried not to say. This uncomfortable insight is probably the kind of thing that makes him a good Sheriff. "He'd be one of the Alpha pair, right? Because you have a relationship with him." There's a brief pause, and then, "*Jesus Christ*, are you *having sex* with my son?"

Derek pales, because he wasn't prepared for this line of questioning. "No," he answers, but the word is a hair too slow, too wavering, as he frantically considers exactly what the definition of 'sex' might be in this circumstance.

He inhales, all set to dig himself further into that hole, but John holds up his hand, and Derek swallows his words.

Without making further eye contact, John stands up and walks briskly into the living room, stands there with his hands on his hips facing the fireplace, staring at a picture on the mantel that clearly shows his deceased wife. Tension and anger and grief radiate from him, taint the air in the room.

Derek waits in the doorway, chewing on the inside of one cheek, suffering through the nearly painful, camphoraceous sting of John's emotions, foolishly hoping to detect some trace of approval. Arms still tightly crossed, he's uncharacteristically nervous, has no idea what John will do next. He glances warily at the gun holstered to John's hip and waits. And waits, shifting from side to side as the clock ticks loudly between them.

When John finally turns around, he looks much calmer. He rubs at his forehead, between his eyes, as though fighting off a headache. "Okay," he says, voice rough. "Here's how it's going to be. I

want you to back off for a while. I'm just going to call in to work for a few days, since we haven't made any headway on finding the other hunters, and see what I can do to just *be here* and take care of Stiles."

Derek can't help stiffening in protest, recalling that the last time he was sent away, Stiles had a panic attack and involuntarily shifted into fox form. John shakes his head and lifts a hand to stall any rebuttal and continues, "Look. I believe you have Stiles' best interests at heart, I really do. So prove it to me. Give him a chance to get his feet under him. Give him a chance to *make a choice*. I will definitely call you if anything comes up or if something happens to Stiles that I can't handle, okay. I just. I want to figure out where he's at, and. Where we are. He needs to go to the doctor. I. There's a lot to do. And I need to see how he handles life and all its obstacles without using you as a crutch."

Derek feels winded and dizzy, as though he's received a massive blow, and it must show on his face.

"Derek. You're right. I don't know or understand everything that's happened to him in the last couple of weeks, and you have no idea how much that hurts me." John's voice wavers and cracks, before he visibly pulls himself back together. "And rationally I know that my kid is not the same person that I last saw, okay. I *know* he's different, that nothing can just go back to the way it was. We can't pretend this never happened, and I'll have to learn to live with that. But I need some time to evaluate.

"Stiles needs therapy. Hell, *I* need therapy, and I'm sure you do, too. He needs to be reintroduced to the life he left. To learn not to be so codependent. And I want some time with him without you being here, because you consume all his attention." John finishes on a pleading note, and Derek's defensiveness shatters. John is a father, and letting his son go, so suddenly and in such grievous circumstances, with absolutely no warning or time to adjust: of course it hurts. Of course he's scared and angry and... jealous.

Derek touches his chest, as if his fingers can actually reach the bonds that nest there, Stiles' the brightest and most intense of them all. Right now it radiates sleep and contentment, bringing Derek comfort. So he nods his head, and strides forward to shake John's hand. "Please call me if he needs me. Or if you do." He shrugs, with a wry twist of his face, "because you're pack now, too. And I'll help all I can." At the front door he hesitates. "Be very, *very* careful about bringing him out of the house, John, if that's your plan. He's already demonstrated that stress makes him shift, and I don't know how you're going to explain that to anyone else without endangering us all."

John laughs a little. "We'll only go to the doctor, Derek. That's enough for now."

Derek nods again. "I'll keep searching for the hunters," he says, "check with the Argents and see what they know. I'll tell you if I find anything." It's hard to leave, he wants to stay on the threshold all night. John seems to recognize that, and comes forward to take the door out of his hand. "Thank you, Derek," he says, formal and dismissive, pushing Derek back by encroaching on his personal space. Derek steps reluctantly outside before nodding goodbye and turning away. The door clicks decisively closed behind him. He huffs. *And don't let it hit your ass on the way out* doesn't really need to be verbalized, does it.

The next few days are going to be awful, he can already feel the yawning emptiness where Stiles should be, but he waits for several miles before he loses the mournful howl that's been choking him.

Chapter End Notes

While I was editing this chapter today, [this song](#) came up, and I and got all the goosebumps: it totally speaks of where Stiles and Derek are right now. (The first four minutes, at least. I love Temper Trap.)

Speaking of editing, I didn't manage my time well enough to get this to a beta, and I feel like the whole thing is stilted and unnatural and dull as all get out. Ah, well. I suppose you'll have to suffer through it? At least it moves us a step ahead. Meanwhile, thank you for all your lovely comments on the last chapter (I didn't get to answer all of you, but please don't feel slighted!) Y'all give me fuel, you really do. You're the bestest!

Out of Phase (Nothing Feels Right Anymore)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles slowly blinks himself awake. His room is out of focus and obscured with gloom and shadow, although the sky outside is pearly gray. It is undoubtedly quite early, and he's surprised to see that he slept clear through the night. When he rolls over, he can smell himself and Derek in the puff of air that rises from under the blankets. It is a potent combination that dominates every other scent in the room. He lifts a hand to touch his very human nose,

The lingering notes of musk and sweat, crisp forest and sticky skin, trigger flashing sense-memories of the night before. Broad hands, molding his body, each stroke and gesture trimming away jagged edges of fear and uncertainty. Somehow, when Derek coaxed the taut stretch of Stiles' body into an arch dependent on his Dom for support, each tightened muscle had shed everything except for deep security and hedonism; bliss vanquished stress in a soothing slide. As his skin grew hot and each heavy heartbeat pushed Derek's control more thoroughly through every nerve, Stiles could let go, sink into his body without struggling, drift on an endless ocean of sensation and arousal, every part of him with a pulse suddenly a new erogenous zone. Derek's body stabilized him like a bulwark, as reliable as seasons, as the slow slide of glaciers through a canyon; a base upon which he could transfigure Stiles into a vessel that ran clear with an emboldened thrill of eroticism and abandon.

It had been so intoxicating - a prodigious relief after the subdrop he'd been combating all day.

Inhaling deeply, Stiles huffs reminders of last night through flared nostrils and opened mouth; the very air pushing buttons he didn't know he had, influencing him straight down to his limbic system. He slides his hand down his belly, scratching his nails through his pubic hair, floating on the memory of Derek's hands, a nonverbal dictation, his every gentle direction making Stiles feel more sultry, more controlled, beautiful; strong and safe and free in a way he'd never felt before.

His cock rolls up his thigh as it fills with clamorous blood. Stiles' ears (less sensitive as a human than when he's in his ... fox ... form – and, *Whoa, self, you are a truly ludicrous specimen of werewolfdom*) are still acute enough to hear the beating of his heart and the surging susurrations as blood rushes through his veins. He rests a finger delicately along his erection, pushing gently until he's oriented straight, pointed up towards his chin. His body swelters as he replays how Derek had held him, stretched backwards, remembers the effortless exhilaration in being beguiled into climax: Derek's fingers, demanding and skillful, twisting in his ass, lighting him up, taking him to the summit of sensation with no uncertainty. Stiles had plunged over the edge, but he'd never felt imperiled, never considered that he wouldn't be caught when he reached the bottom.

He spiders his hand across his pubic bone, creeps past his balls, shifts one knee outward so that he can push the pad of his index finger against his anus. He flushes when he thinks of why it feels a little gummy, of Derek, carefully combining their spunk and then pushing it inside Stiles. *Dude, why is that so hot???* And of course, this makes Stiles think of what it will be like when it isn't just Derek's fingers inside him; when it's going to be Derek's cock, when that come will be released inside him directly, no need for an intermediary.

That thought is inflaming... until it is shattered with the sudden, vivid memory of the basement, obtrusive and overwhelming: Gunner sneering while Stiles' face slipped through pooled coffee as Rudy gleefully held him down –

What was fine in the sanctuary Derek had created for him last night – what hadn't even pinged his radar – is no longer something he can even contemplate. So now, he mentally recoils from his reverie of fingers and asses.

Stiles makes a choked sound and leaps out of bed. He tangles with his blankets on the way out, tripping and crashing foolishly to the floor, but that's normal, and he brushes it off. He'll brush it all off. He's stronger than this. He doesn't have to think about what happened, he'll just. Think of other things. Not sex: that urge has just died a quick and unpleasant death with the incursion of such an ugly memory.

But it is hard, such a grueling, uphill battle, to 'not think of elephants', as he and Scott used to play.

After Mom had died, though, Stiles got better at not thinking of elephants, able to ruthlessly drive his mind away from a painful topic; and he does so now.

Shower. Time for a shower. And then downstairs. He can hear his father, rustling around the kitchen, but no one else, and chides himself over the intensity of his disappointment that he can neither smell nor hear Derek in the house. He supposes he shouldn't be surprised that the man didn't spend the night, given what happened the last time his dad had found Derek in his bed.

He touches his neck. It still feels a little sore and bruised. But mostly, right now, and this fills him with conflicting feelings, it feels bare. Stiles has worn a collar since he first presented as a sub – nearly five years. Although the people at school don't behave towards him the same way they do with female submissives, it's generally understood that a collar is a symbol that encloses them in a safe space. They are loved and protected, no matter where they are.

A collar means that the people around you treat you with the respect (and temperance) your status commands. While Stiles had never really reaped that particular benefit – his collar seems to make him a target more than it designates him as someone to be revered and cared for – that didn't make a difference to how he responded to it as a symbol... in the most fundamental and visceral way.

His collar held him in. Stiles so often spun frenetic: his thoughts (and his mouth, and his body) running too fast, dragging him along willy-nilly in their wake; energy pouring through him until he would burst at the seams, crack like a special effect, light pouring out and widening him into disjointed fragments.

In those overwhelming moments, he could always touch his collar, or simply swallow, flexing his throat to feel its gentle pressure. It felt like... like his father's hand on his shoulder. Pressing down firm and certain, reining Stiles in when he got out of his own control. At school, where he was so often teased and despised, the collar meant that what others thought of him didn't matter. He was loved. All the strength and surety of the Sheriff bore behind him, helping him to stand strong. The collar made him *worthy*.

The collar the hunters bound him with, however. Stiles' eyes flash stygian in rage. *That* was purely slavery and degradation. It was control in the worst sense of the word, violating and non-consensual. Choking and hurting him physically was only half of the damage that collar had done.

He stands now in front of his dresser. He's still naked, reflected from the waist up, and shivering. He can see goosebumps puckering his skin, bluish-white and ugly. He pulls open the top drawer, which has several collars he's worn over the years. All of them are soft, cotton, meant for children, really; collars for a parent to use until they pass their sub-child into another Dom's care as a newly fledged adult. Stiles touches a dark red one, that he'd loved so much it had become frayed and his Dad had made him pick out a new one. He swallows. He could put it on. It might help with the way he feels like he's drifting, unanchored.

Everything about this kidnapping/werewolf situation is insane and unprecedented, and Stiles has had no warning, no chance to prepare. There's not even research he can think to do to make it better. He watches himself in the mirror as he tries to make a sound. A grating, choppy wheeze is all that comes out, and Stiles presses his lips tightly back together, hating the sound, hating himself, hating the collar and the people who had done this to him.

In a flash, he leans forward and violently pushes everything on the dresser onto the floor. The lamp hits the corner of his desk with a satisfying crash, but everything else is soft, the drop absorbed by the carpet. Muted. (The irony of that doesn't escape Stiles.)

Suddenly desperate to make noise, he wrestles the mirror off the wall. His body is weakened, even if the cuts and bruises are mostly healed. The mirror fights back in a most frustrating way, and Stiles pants his fury, pulling stupidly until the nail slides out of the wall. He staggers back under the sudden weight and heaves it at the door, where it thuds and falls forward. It doesn't even break.

Stiles goes a little wild, then. He pulls the tangled handful of collars out of the drawer and throws them after the mirror, moves to his little bookcase and gets much more satisfying crashes as he tosses books at the walls. He feels like a stalled rocket, racing and raging in a pool of flame and fuel and unable to lift off.

He pushes the bookcase down and then huddles beside it, fingers unconsciously gouging furrows across his forearms, mouth open in silenced savagery. All of this energy built up, and nowhere for it to go: no sound, no physical stamina in his skinny, depleted body, no outlet for his thoughts.

His eyes are dry, and hot and stretched uncomfortably wide.

Footsteps pound up the stairs. "Stiles!" His father pushes the door open, and the mirror scrapes against the floor, resistant. "Stiles—" he shoulders his way through, and Stiles averts his eyes, pulling his shoulders in and glaring out the window at the blurry glow of the sycamore, and doesn't think that the burning in his eyes might be tears.

John ignores the mess and crosses over to Stiles, kneeling by his side, wrapping his hand around the back of his neck. "Honey—" he notices the bloody streaks on Stiles' arms, and Stiles can hear his heart stutter and then take off, but that doesn't stop him from the unfettered clawing. John grabs his hand, wrapping it in his own. "What are you doing? Stop it. *Stop*. Oh, Stiles." And Stiles can't look at him, just shivers and shakes with everything that's caught inside him, frantic and resentful and afraid, and utterly incapable of verbalizing (even if his voice worked) what it feels like to have no collar, how out of phase everything is. The child collars are *wrong*. The hunters' collar was *wrong*. Being bare is *wrong*. He scarcely feels like he even exists, right now.

John shifts and settles them both side by side against the wall, pulls Stiles in by his neck, cradles his head against his shoulder, wraps both arms tight around him when he curls up his legs, makes himself a tiny, naked oval. "Okay, son. It's okay. You'll be alright."

But John's hands feel eldritch and ill-fitting where they grasp him. They're too cool, too callused; his fingers too slender. They are not Derek's hands. Stiles allows his father to situate him into this familiar position, trying to bring him down, but Stiles' skin is crawling, his stomach lurching, and instead of slowing down, his heart is racing, and hot tears keep leaking from his eyes in narrow, unbroken rivulets.

John tries. He calms his breathing, holds Stiles close and still, speaks in the slow, soothing tone he's always used. But Stiles can't settle, fingers jerking, desperate to ground himself in the raggedly broken skin of his arms. "Stiles, do you need to kneel? What do you need, please, tell me. It is. I'll do it. I'll get it. *I promise*, Stiles. You just have to tell me."

The very question makes Stiles feel more adrift. How can he respond? What he needs is for someone to *tell* him the answer, not to add to his uncertainty by asking more of him. He bites his lips until they're bruised and just shakes his head, *No, no, no*.

The wavering need that's been building in Stiles, this creeping sense that's he's in the wrong place, makes Stiles want to scream and strike out, but he violently locks those feelings down. He wants someone to command him, not ask him and offer choices. He wants to be pressed down firmly, so that even when he struggles he can't move. He wants boundaries to be clearly set and impenetrable, immutable.

But he's obviously not going to get that today, and he tightens his guts and his determination and *steps up*, because he loves his dad, and doesn't want to stress him. Because he *knows* how much he's hurt his father already, getting kidnapped and hurt, being gone for so long. Turning. Turning into a were-er-werefox. The anguish that's manifest in Dad's voice is irrefutable and acid.

John is taking time off of work to take care of him, and Stiles is *sixteen*. He shouldn't need babysitting like this, should be able to stand on his own feet for the eight hours of a work day, and he derides himself silently for whining and piling and throwing a tantrum.

John clutches Stiles' hands tightly in one of his own, holds Stiles' head in the crook of neck and shoulder with the other, and speaks in a broken voice. "I just. Stiles. I'm not doing this right. I know I'm making mistakes, and. And." He takes a deep breath. "I've always been terrified, with you. When your mother died, when we came home from her funeral, I looked at you and it was so. Enormous. There you were: trusting me to make it better. And I didn't feel like I could make anything right again, *ever*. You were so young, and so smart. You trusted me. You just stood right there in the living room, I remember, watching me and *waiting*.

"You're so much like your mother, son. Every bright part of you: your laugh, your curiosity, your impatience and your energy. I. That day, my hands were literally shaking with the need to draw you in and make you safe, make you happy again. To cherish you and every part of your mom that I see in you."

Stiles lies still against his father, carefully exhaling in a controlled stream, trying to envision blowing out his anger, his conceit. John's head tips a little to the side, brushing his cheek against Stiles' hair when he speaks. Stiles listens to his heart, pounding against the wall of the chest under his ear; fast, but strong, and steady, like his dad has always been. He closes his eyes. The tears stop, drying sticky-tight across his cheeks.

"My biggest job, my... the most vital task I have in my life is *you*, Stiles. You're my light, kiddo. And. And I lost you. I. I came home one night and you were *gone*. You were *gone*, and you

didn't come back. I. I do this shit for a living, Stiles. So many days passed, and we couldn't even find any leads, and. My heart cracked to pieces. It's just been. An endless nightmare.

"I thought nothing could be worse than losing your Mom. But I was wrong. Because then... at least I knew what was happening. I knew why—" John pulls in a shuddering breath, and Stiles twists a little, so he can squeeze the hand that wraps around his own, offering comfort.

"I want to pick you up. I want to put a band-aid on your knee and tease you until you laugh and. Make you better. If I could, I'd gather you to me and put you directly in my heart. I'd never let you go." John sighs, and scrubs his hand across Stiles arm and shoulder, pulling him in even more. "There's nothing else I want to do with my time then love you and protect you, do you understand? Nothing. You are it. And Stiles. You can tell me. Really. *Anything* you need."

They sit like that for a long time. Long enough to watch the light move, shadows growing stronger and more defined as the sun brightens up the new day. John's hands move in familiar patterns, stroking and smoothing his love into Stiles' very skin, as their breathing falls into sync.

Stiles is calm, now; emotional overload, accumulated exhaustion and hunger play no small part in his physical acquiescence. He remains un-dropped. When he finally lifts his head, the eyes that meet his father's are lucid, if bloodshot and swollen. What they see is John's face, carved in creases of worry and distress.

"Do you want to talk about it?" John asks, voice soft with concern. "Or, you know. Type about it?" He gives a faint, wry grin.

Stiles vehemently shakes his head. No, he categorically doesn't want to 'talk'.

He wants everything to be the way it was before. He wants Derek. He wants to not feel like his guts are wet tissue paper in a hurricane, that would be nice. But his father just ripped himself wide open, and Stiles can't bear to poke anywhere that might hurt. Just as much as his dad's been taking care of him for the past eight years, so has Stiles been taking care of John: trying to protect him, trying to give him comfort and a happy home. Cooking and worrying and trying to forge a new normal around the chasm left in the wake of his mother's death.

It's weird to hear his dad spell out their relationship and his obligations like this, and Stiles is kind of glad they're next to each other, staring at the dresser and all the detritus of his tantrum. He wouldn't want to have heard this parental catharsis while making eye contact. Stiles has to draw a line somewhere.

He swallows and gives his dad a quick hug before extricating himself. It's been something like an hour, and Stiles' ass feels flat and sore. And also naked. Naked, with bits of carpet fuzz embedded in his buttcheeks: Nice.

John stands up just after him, hands dangling aimlessly by his sides. He looks lost, aging and devastated, and Stiles closes his eyes against it.

Don't cry. Just stop it. You're hurting him more, look at him. Stand up straight and pull yourself together.

John cups his hand around Stiles' jaw. "Kiddo—" and Stiles can't stand it, so he ducks away, with a wan smile. He flaps at his dad to go ahead and leave so he can dress, and tries to inconspicuously scrub his cheeks when John's back is turned.

Chapter End Notes

Here you are my loves. I added almost an entire chapter because of all your comments last week, in an effort to let you see inside John's head a little more. And Stiles' as well. I know John still hasn't explicitly said he told Derek to back off for a while (because he's a little selfish, and a little cowardly, and aren't we all?), but he did hedge his bets by saying he'd do whatever Stiles needed. And Stiles is being a dumbass by *not* saying he needs Derek, and by assuming his Dad would rather not be worried than do what's right for him. But they've progressed a little, and they'll get there. Rome wasn't built (or torn down) in a day, after all, and they have a lifetime of established behaviors to break through.

I'm sorry to be late, darlings, and thank you for your sweet and concerned comments. Politics here in the States after the election is a nightmare (a Trumpmare, ugh, so gross), and for those of you celebrating a very uncomfortable family Thanksgiving (ack, I've got a dozen coming in tomorrow!), take this (angsty, sorry) chapter and sneak off into a corner and just forget about it for a while. I'm thankful for fanfiction! How about the rest of you?

Bootstraps

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the gap in posting. The past month has been very hard, and I spent much of it in the hospital recovering from a ruptured aneurysm and significant blood loss. (Ah, yes, in case I needed any more evidence that 2016 sucked balls. Frankly, 2017 looks even grimmer, and some days I'm sorry I tried so hard to reach the phone to call 911. But that might just be when the narcotics are wearing off.... Actually, if I hadn't dropped my cell phone nearby (thank fucking god for voice-activated cell phones!) when I fell, I wouldn't have succeeded, and I'd have bled out, and y'all would never know why the story was abandoned, isn't that a scary thought? Mostly, I'm just glad my son didn't get off the bus later that day and find me, jesus.)

Now my spleen is dying, so all there is to do is wait for it to infarct (insert middle school cackling here, because that word is truly asking for it) and necrotize, a process which is surprisingly painful and extraordinarily tiring. I didn't expect to be hit with such immediate and graphic confirmation that turning 45 means your body starts falling apart. On the bright side, a spontaneous splenic aneurysm is quite rare, and now I get to be a case study, so there's that.

This chapter was hours away from being posted when the rupture happened, so it only needed a little polishing, and I'm happy I can give y'all something. As I am functionally stoned all the time, let's hope it isn't worse than it was before I attempted a final edit, heh. I can't guarantee that I will get back on schedule immediately, but I'm trying, and I won't forget you. As always, thank you for ~~letting me whine~~ all the wonderful comments you leave. I may not have responded, but please know that I cherish each one as it comes in.

Stiles heads for the bathroom first, showering just to stop the crawling of his skin, to rinse away the thin lines of blood on his arms. They're hardly bleeding now, although Stiles doesn't know if that's testament to his new (substandard) healing powers or the pitiful depth of his scratches. He pats himself dry with the dark brown towels his dad bought out of self-defense years earlier, and if any blood is smeared there, it won't matter at all.

Back in his room, he dresses himself in layers like amour, topping everything off with his favorite hoodie, soft and snuggly and red: essentially a fabric hug. He dawdles for a few more minutes to compose himself: picks up some of the books he'd thrown around, moves the mirror to lean against the wall. (Nothing to see here, folks.)

When he enters the kitchen, his dad is there, too, also damp from a shower. But while John smells of fresh shampoo and aftershave, his familiar 'dad' scent is still subsumed in an aura of stress and grief.

So Stiles pulls on that backbone his father has so often praised him for, and pushes everything else away. *Stiff upper lip, old chap!* He starts for the coffee pot but when he opens the beans, the sharp, rich aroma sends him hurtling dizzyingly back to the basement: mopping coffee off the floor with shaking hands; feeling it smear, cold and saccharine, under his cheek. Stiles swings around in a

precipitous about-face and fumbles in the cabinet for an ancient box of tea. *Don't think of elephants, don't think of elephants.*

It works. With a few deliberately comical flaps of his hands, he silently shooes his dad into a chair at the table before pulling eggs from the fridge, popping bread in the toaster. John tries to help, but Stiles waves him off, frowning ferociously. He does let John make his own coffee, though.

His father relaxes considerably after Stiles sits down to eat, and Stiles is pleased.

"You're so strong, Stiles," John says later, after he's finished breakfast. He pauses long enough to point authoritatively at a neglected piece of toast, which Stiles obediently shoves in his mouth.

"You've been through such an ordeal, and I'm pretty sure I just watched you pull your *own self* out of a subdrop, is that right?" He smiles, big and proud. "That's incredible, son. I don't think any other sub could have done it."

What John intends to communicate, Stiles is sure, is simply that Stiles is resilient and determined. What Stiles' inner submissive hears, however, is that it's good that he's been strong; ergo, inversely, it's bad when he's weak, when he needs help, when he can't do it himself. For a moment, choking down dry crumbs of toast that seem to multiply in his throat like a gutful of gravel, he thinks about the word his dad used. (Strong. Stalwart. Stiles stares at the table and considers what that means. What it means is... indomitable. He is a sub who is indomitable, which is good, except for how his entire being *cries out for domination*. Life is fucked up, and Stiles is sixteen, and how the *fuck* is he supposed to be able to figure it out, with all these contradictions and complexities???)

But he forces himself to smile a little, nod at the compliment because his father is so sincere and so very proud, and just curls his toes tightly in his shoes. *Don't think of elephants.*

He can't really imagine much he'd rather do less than spend the day visiting doctors. He cups his cooling mug between both hands, no more comfort to be drawn from warmed ceramic. The tea tastes like dust and age, only vaguely obscured with the hurried, inadequate addition of sugar and milk. Somehow, that feels like a metaphor.

John stands up and pulls Stiles out of his seat to crush him in a warm hug, arms tight around his shoulders and back. "I love you so much, son," he murmurs into Stiles' hair. "We're gonna be alright."

Stiles sticks his nose into his dad's neck and just breathes.

Later, in the car on the way to the hospital to consult with a doctor, Stiles leans his head on the window and stares at the broken white lane line flashing hypnotically as it passes just under his nose. It is raining thinly, scarcely more than fog, which is nice insofar as the lowering blanket of cloud means the air isn't quite so cold as it has been. But it makes everything dreary and dulled, sodden and lifeless. Not unusual for a California winter, but not particularly appealing at the moment, either. His phone is in his hands, but he can't be bothered to even pull up a game of spider solitaire. He holds on to it, though, the familiar rectangle warm in his hands. It gives him something to fidget. Something to distract himself with, if he needs it.

Stiles shifts in his seat, scooting far enough left to place himself directly in the stream of heat blowing from the vent. Anemic droplets gather on the windshield before getting beaten aside by the lazy, intermittent swipe of the wipers, and Stiles ponders Brownian motion, which they'd been studying in chemistry when he had last gone to school. He is a boy-sized example of the concept, he muses: all his wretched feelings, vile and dolorous and sordid, are ratcheted into tiny little balls that ricochet around his body, knocking against each other, bouncing off his organs and his skin and the wet, gray convolutions of his brain until everything is motion, pinging around endlessly in the container of himself.

It hurts, but he's not about to let on.

Melissa meets them at the door of the hospital, and hugs Stiles tightly, dragging his head down to fit against her shoulder, ignoring the fact that he's a good foot taller than she is now. "Oh, baby," she sighs against his head. "I'm so glad you're home." Melissa is neutral, and has never been too sure how to treat Stiles according to his sub status. So she mothers him the same way she does Scott, and that didn't change when they both presented. He sniffs, and catalogs her scent, so different to his new nose, and pushes his face against her shoulder and twists his hands in the back of her scrubs. For a few suspended moments they stand still, clutched against each other, the bustle and poorly suppressed anxiety of the hospital happening, muted and phantasmagorical, outside their little bubble.

The doctor, after a traumatizingly thorough examination, pronounces Stiles to be more or less fine. She's sympathetic and reserved, manipulates him this way and that as she checks his body. She asks John to step out for a moment and then questions Stiles about the possibility of sexual abuse during his captivity. He shakes his head, *No*, and that is that, she just moves on.

In the end, when John comes back in, she speaks to him as Stiles' Dom: Stiles is suffering from the after-effects of prolonged malnutrition and stress and exhaustion, so she prescribes Boost and other supplements until his weight is back up to normal. She says there's no reason that he can't continue his normal life, but to take it easy with any sports, to listen to his body. She can feel laryngeal swelling when she palpates his neck and thinks that his voice should come back soon, as the inflammation subsides, that it's nothing to worry about. She strongly suggests therapy, but when John asks her for a recommendation, she seems caught short. It's all right, John says. They'll look up the therapist that they'd used after Claudia had died.

Stiles stares at the scuffed toe-board between the wall and floor and lets them talk over him. He's a sub, he doesn't need to be included in this conversation about his own health. But then he feels guilty about thinking such things while his father sits next to him, smelling stressed and troubled and holding Stiles' hand in a slightly sweaty grip, pressed tightly to his knee, as if that would buffer the both of them from any bad news.

Melissa comes back in after the doctor leaves and fusses around the room quietly for a few moments. She has some shots to give Stiles, vitamins and stuff, he thinks, he wasn't really paying attention. It takes a little while before he notices the intense looks she keeps giving him, shifting her gaze between him and his dad, eyebrows crooked with confusion and curiosity. Once Stiles picks up on it, he rolls his eyes. *Of course* Scott couldn't keep his mouth shut. Fuck.

He pokes his finger at Melissa's shoulder and raises one eyebrow at her when she stills. He rolls his eyes again, but she just looks stubbornly blank. Stiles grimaces and puts his hands behind his head, fingers poking up like waving ears while he bares his teeth. He probably looks like someone playing a deranged rabbit in a game of charades, but he figures it's close enough. He crosses his arms in front of him and doesn't try to temper his glare. *Go on, then. Spit it out.*

"Oh. Um." Melissa's uncertainty merges with embarrassment. "Yeah." She's not *too* embarrassed, though. She's always been his second mom, and she's way too deeply entangled in their family business to not feel that she has a right to be involved. She props both arms akimbo on her hips. Stiles almost smiles at the reminder her posture brings of younger days, when he and Scott would have a wild adventure that grown ups somehow always interpreted as misbehavior.

John watches the interplay and gets it, Stiles can see understanding spread across his features. He shakes his head a little, as familiar with Scott's inability to keep secrets as Stiles is. "Ah," he says. "Scott told you about the, uh, the thing?" he asks Melissa, and she immediately sinks onto the little rolling doctor stool, clearly ready for the down low.

"I thought maybe he'd started doing drugs," she admits, one corner of her mouth curling into a smile. "Except that he's *Scott*. Can you tell me what's going on?"

John sighs. "I'm not sure if I can, really, it's so unbelievable. You'll be thinking the lot of us are hallucinating."

Melissa pushes her stool closer to John, whose voice has gotten much quieter. Stiles flops down onto the obnoxiously, deafeningly crackling paper of the exam table and curls up, facing the wall. He doesn't need to be a part of this, to be a freak show exhibit. He knows intellectually that telling Melissa is important, if only because she can help rein in Scott's flapping tongue, but he doesn't need to listen to a recap. He stares at the beige wall, streaked here and there with some bored kid's dirty hand or flailing shoe. He tries not to think about what an aberration he is. And all this *on top* of being a male sub. As if he couldn't become any stranger, any less relatable.

He desperately wishes for Derek.

In the car on the way home, John says, "Melissa asked when you would go back to school. I mean. The doctor says that at this point, nothing physical is stopping you."

Stiles holds his hand around his throat and shakes his head. He's not even ready to think about it, yet. He's hardly preventing himself from spontaneously flying apart at any given moment.

John lets the subject drop, and Stiles bolts upstairs when they finally get back. He can hear John puttering in the kitchen before moving to his office, making a few calls, doing what work he can from home. Huddled on his bed, Stiles stares mournfully out the window, waiting for Derek.

He wishes he knew Derek's number. He wishes he felt like words were accessible enough to even text, if he can't make himself speak them. But they're not.

Derek had mentioned a bond, and Stiles searches himself for such a thing. His perceptions are different as a werefox, even when he's in his human shift. Physical parts of his body are much easier to isolate and analyze than they ever were before. Each bunch of muscles has its specific purpose, and takes little effort to move in stretch or flexion. He tries that as he lies there. Starts with his toes and fingertips, tensing and relaxing: the energy that flows through him just from use of his body is exhilarating and addictive.

As a human, Stiles has ADHD, yes, but being sporadically hyper doesn't mean that he isn't essentially lazy, preferring to spend his time sedentary, in front of the computer. After all, his mind can flit and fly without his body needing to move. Even in lacrosse, where he'd been demoted to water boy and bench warmer once he'd presented, he had to work to acquire the gumption of exertion, enjoying it once he was going, but hard to muster otherwise.

He closes his eyes and just *feels* his corporeal self. The incredible power of his glutes, the most massive muscle in his body. The strength in the quadriceps of his upper legs. The tension in his abs, the way they connect upper and lower body, ready to twist and bend: limber, tensile. Energy flows up and down his arms in sparking electric leaps, tracing biceps and coursing through the slight burn of scratches on his forearms. His fingers twitch, so dexterous and clever. It's not that he's stronger than he used to be, after all, he's been starved and captive for two weeks. It's just that he can feel the presence and the potential of himself in a way he could never catalog before.

His heart thuds in his chest, and that's where he finally senses something that is distinctly *not* flesh and blood. An extra warmth, a pulling tension behind his breastbone that feels like *Derek*. Like Alpha-Dom. Like challenge and security. Like ballast and stability. Like being irrevocably dissected and gently reassembled.

He presses his fingertips to his sternum, tracing over ridges of bone and skin, as if he could touch the bond itself. He feels it flutter with each breath in, and flow outward in a joyous rush when he exhales. Ever experimental, he pinches his finger and thumb together as if holding a thread, tries to follow the direction of the curious feeling. He flails around at first, but as he relaxes further, breathing deeper, sliding sideways into an almost meditative state, he can imagine something caught between the pads of his fingers, a faint golden thread. It feels most tangible in a path towards the window, a westerly direction, and Stiles wonders if that's where Derek is: with his betas somewhere west of Stiles' home.

The thought of Derek with his betas makes Stiles feel lonely and small, isolated and abandoned. The bond as he perceives it fades, on his end, from nebulously gold into something colder and sharper, transmitting his internal whine and plea. *Come get me, Alpha. I need your presence; need your arms, and your eyes; the roughness of your stubble and the breadth of your shoulders.* An actual whine escapes him, choppy, but audible, and Stiles isn't sure at all how he feels about this noise-making business, wonders how much it might pull him back into a world he's charily reluctant to rejoin as yet.

To his shock, he feels a returning ping to his supplication, this ethereal nexus now resonating with affection and support. *Need you, need you*, Stiles sends. And the response feels like steady hands on his wrists, like a heavy weight on his body, like authority and confidence. A humiliating tear of relief seeps out just enough to pool under his lashes, making them sticky and wet, because he feels as if he's been longing for Derek for *hours*.

He pushes against the feeling a little, against the sensation of weight and restraint, as if trying to find a weak spot, a place to dart through, or away. He's testing his boundaries again.

Derek's reaction is amusement, and the feeling of being held down intensifies to the point that Stiles actually flings his hands above his head, gripping under the headboard, pushing his body down with gravity and sheer will. The bond feels solid, now, like rope, rooted and *certain*, inexorable against his tentative challenge.

The ephemeral notion of bristle scrapes across his temple, and Stiles' lips part in a slow smile. He twists his body slightly, and feels enveloped by the sensation of the bond, cocooned and safe. But it is teasing as well, tickles down his ribs, flicks an ear, pushes uncompromisingly against his chest and his hips with smug certainty. The mist of it ruffles through the hair of his legs, as if clothing is not a thing that exists, wraps around his ankles, drifts like cool fingers taunting the soles of his feet.

Stiles throws his head back, pushes it into his pillow, and *revels* in the feeling of safety and affection, in the sensation of touch on skin that has felt starved for it.

The feeling fades after a while, sub and Dom both gradually losing the intensity of their focus. Stiles lies on the bed in a puddle of contentment and relaxation, blood and skin gently thrumming with satisfaction. Staring at the ceiling now feels meditative rather than entrapping.

Not half an hour later, Stiles cocks a (metaphorical) ear when an unfamiliar car pulls in the driveway. The heartbeat that accompanies it is strong and steady, slow enough that Stiles can tell the person feels secure and confident. Moments later, the doorbell rings, and his dad goes to answer it.

“Yes? Hello?”

“Chris Argent, Sheriff Stilinski. Nice to finally meet you.”

In Which There Is An Unplanned Downtown Expedition (Alternatively: Elephants)

Chapter Notes

Caution: This chapter has a flashback to when the video of Stiles' abuse was being recorded. So. Consider this your warning, my delicate darlings. Gird your loins. (But you'll get soooo much comfort in Chapters 27 & 28, don't you fret.)

FANART! The generous and talented [myrkky](#) made the picture at the end of this chapter. Go [reblog](#) and tell her how lovely it is!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Ah,” John’s heart speeds up, and Stiles can nearly *smell* him growing more alert. “Come inside, Mr. Argent.”

“Thank you. And please call me Chris.”

“John,” the Sheriff returns, guarded.

After shaking hands and some murmured pleasantries, the pair settle in the living room, and Stiles creeps into the hallway, stops to lean against the corner at the top of the stairs. It’s not like he has to *actually* leave his room: his hearing is certainly good enough to eavesdrop through any number of closed doors as long as the discussion is being had within the house, but it’s hard to adapt his old instincts to his new ones. Even in the hallway he strains, pushing his focus into his ears, seeking out each beating heart, the rush of blood pushed hard through restricting vessels. An agitated swipe of his hand across his hair reveals the thoroughly unexpected presence of two enormous, furry ears... which, a) how cool is that? And b) how very inconvenient for this to be so uncontrolled. But Stiles doesn’t have time to dwell on his spontaneous ability to partially shift: like Scarlett, he’ll think about that tomorrow. (Stiles knows his classics, okay?)

However, thoughts of chimeric ears and southern belles vanish as the scent of Mr. Argent seeps up from the living room. He smells primarily, and strongly, of soap and damp, so it’s obvious that he’s had a recent shower. Probably to scrub away the lingering stench of aconite, but the residue still faintly remains. Stiles heart races with fearful memory, and his guts clamor for *fight or flight*. He curls one hand around the top of the banister and parks his ass against the wall, antsy, chewing a thumb nail, waiting to see how this is going to go down.

He vividly remembers Scott’s new girlfriend, Allison Argent, saying that she and her father were *hunters*, like the people who had taken and hurt him and Derek. Simply as a matter of principle he should mistrust the calm, confident man he can hear downstairs: not just that he’ll probably be lying, but that his father might actively be in danger. ‘Treaty’ or no.

But....

While the two men politely cover the general bases, each probing cautiously to find out how much the other knows without committing himself to acknowledging the bizarrely supernatural, Stiles closes his eyes and focuses on his animal impressions. His ears pivot this way and that. His nostrils flare and his mouth drops open. John's frustration seeps up the steps in notes of ozone and overheated engine (probably due to discovering that he's been utterly oblivious to so much that has been going on in his town). Chris, underneath the soap and the aconite, smells of his daughter, of a lot of time spent outdoors; and he resonates with the same steely core of determination and reliability that Stiles' dad has, which is disconcertingly comforting, and leaves Stiles a little shaken at his strange, borderline positive, snap judgement of a *hunter*. And one he hasn't even seen or spoken with. *Don't trust him*, his brain tells his body, but there's definitely dissension in the ranks.

Once the two men have admitted to the overall existence of werewolves, they start on the Hale pack. Chris describes their treaty and touches on the fire and his family's role in it. John listens, alternately fascinated and appalled, and Stiles sourly perceives that hearing all this from a peer, and someone with a background in a career not dissimilar to John's own, rather than a young man only a bit older than his son, has more impact on him. Or maybe it's Mr. Argent's voice: deeper, flintier than John's own, and brisk with professionalism and assurance.

"Allison says that your son was bitten? By Derek Hale?" There's judgement in his inflection, and Stiles' hackles lift; he can feel a growl building in the back of his throat, and for the first time in weeks, the sound feels like something of substance, rather than a whisper with delusions of grandeur.

"Mmmm," John replies, because he is not a fool and can recognize when he's at risk of being lured into a verbal trap. "First let's talk about the hunters who kidnapped him and what you know about them."

"I don't know anything about them," Chris quickly qualifies. "I had no idea that any others were in our territory until Allison reported it to me. Which means they were deliberately sneaking around, because the hunter community, as you might have guessed, is quite small. We don't step on each other's toes as a matter of both courtesy and safety."

John hums again, noncommittal, and papers shuffle, so Stiles is certain he's showing Mr. Argent his notes. "All right, then. Let's see if you recognize any of them. There were four people directly involved in... the kidnapping. Derek has identified their leader as a woman named Laxmi, possibly of Indian or Pakistani descent. Mid-thirties to mid-forties. She's about 5'11", slender but strong, maybe 140 lbs, dark skin and black hair to her chin. Her second is called Baron, a large man with unusually fair skin, short blond hair and beard, perhaps 6'4" and very muscular, maybe 275 lbs, whose accent suggests that he's from somewhere down South. Same age-range.

"There were two other men, the ones responsible for..." John's hesitation is infinitesimal, but still obvious to Stiles, who hears it over the sound of his escalating heartbeat. "... for hurting my son. Gunner wa- ... is mid-forties to mid-fifties, Caucasian with a deep tan, maybe 5'8" and was consistently dressed like a cowboy, with Stetson and even spurs. He was described as skinny, so we're thinking about 130 lbs. The last is Rudy, the youngest of the group, early twenties. He's also Caucasian, medium skin tone, light brown hair cut into a flattop and shaved with patterns on the sides. Multiple tattoos. Dresses "like a homie", Derek said, with a baseball cap and oversized shirt and pants. 5'10", 170.

"All four are Doms, and strong ones at that. Derek said there's no doubt they're hunters, not only because they self-identified as such, but because they were using aconite-infused gas to subdue

him. There was reference made once or twice to a ‘Mr. Willis’ who seemed to be involved in the operation from a distance.”

Sofa springs creak as John must settle back. Stiles can hear the drag of his hand over the faint stubble that he has yet to shave.

“None of them sound familiar off-hand,” Chris says. There is a shuffle of papers that might mean that John has given him a copy of these descriptions for himself. “Have you investigated the place where your son and Derek were held?”

John’s breathing stutters, only slightly, and Stiles figures he’s deciding how much to reveal to Chris, since what he and Derek did by incinerating the cabin and the bodies in it was by no stretch anything but illegal. There is a scarcely noticeable pause before John replies that there was no evidence there, and furthermore that Derek was unable to sniff out where the hunters were actually staying, since they only came in for the day before leaving again each evening.

Chris makes a soft noise, discreetly circumspect, which means (Stiles assumes) that he knows full well there’s stuff John isn’t telling him, but he’s not in a position to press the issue.

They discuss details for a little while longer before John suddenly brings up the video he’d been sent. Stiles, who had sat himself on the top step, goes rigid, breath caught in his chest. His fox ears swivel in agitation, suddenly alert for immediate danger.

“... you can’t see any faces,” John warns, “but maybe...”

“You say your son is upstairs sleeping? Then yes, I’d like to see it,” Chris’s voice is business-like and dispassionate, although his heart belies his calm attitude. “I might recognize a voice, or a... a technique.” He sighs. “You know this is wrong, John? Hunters are supposed to live by a code. Not only has Derek Hale *not* done any human harm, but Stiles is... *was*... a human, and an innocent one at that. These people are *so* far out of line, and if I, or any other ethical hunter, get to them first, there won’t be anyone left for you to arrest.”

John just grunts in response. The smell of determination and anger drifts up the stairs, emanating from both men, and Stiles is again surprised by how heartening he finds it.

There’s some shifting around, and then eventually, the hum of a quiet background coming from tinny phone speakers. The two are watching the video. Stiles curls his fist tight and shoves as much of it as will fit into his mouth. His chest is acting funny, ossified and alien, and when the first voice finally comes, his skin goes icy with fear and rage.

“Alright, Sheriff,” Gunner’s tone is both unctuous and threatening. *“Lookie here, we caught us a boy-sub. A nasty, pussy-ass, whiney little knee-walker.”*

Downstairs, the sound of Chris’s shocked, indrawn breath is overlain with the recorded echo of a slap, and another one, a scuffle and the scrape of furniture moving across a wooden floor.

With a tiny moan, Stiles is consumed in a miasma of memory:

Stiles pushes himself upright after having been slapped down to the chair, snarling silently. He’s dizzy already, head aching from cracking on the concrete the day before, and it’s hard to think straight with his brain sloshing around in the fragile cup of his skull. But what’s a little concussion between friends, hey?

Rudy holds a phone, sprawled in a recliner and smirking, recording the whole thing. Gunner has taken off his stupid cowboy hat and put on a black ski mask. His eyes look even smaller and more weasly framed in the gaping holes of it, and his mouth has an ugly turn accentuated by the black knit.

It's obvious that they're filming this for his dad, and Stiles is grateful for the adrenaline that steels his spine, helps him to resist this barbaric fucking Dom. He's not dumb enough to strike back, but he does straighten himself and glare as well as he can through the one black eye. He can't help flashing a single glance at the camera, though. Dad, Daddy, come find me, please, I know you can find me....

Gunner is shorter than Stiles, which somehow adds insult to – very real – injury. Shorter and lighter, but wiry and strong and as arbitrarily vicious as a wolverine. He grabs Stiles by the ring on the collar and jerks him down before slapping him, left right left right. Stiles shakes his head and pulls back. They haven't Dommed him down yet, and he's going to fight every step of the way. He pushes Gunner away, his arms are unbound, and kicks out with his bare feet. His only clothing at this point is pants, they've taken everything else; but an advantage of that, and Stiles' short hair, is that he's difficult to grab.

In spite of that, and Stiles' larger size, Gunner has been fighting for many years, and Stiles has never had to. His lack of experience means that he's easily overpowered, and however-many days without food means that he's sluggish and light-headed. Gunner eventually tires of flinging him around and starts to Dom. "Down boy, down, on your fucking knees!"

Stiles clenches his fists and narrows his eyes. He's hoping that disgust is superseding terror as the expression on his face, but he's afraid it just means that his expression is wiggling all over the map. Dignity, thy name is Stiles.

"Kneel!" Gunner shouts.

Stiles firms his jaw and rolls his eyes, You dumb fuck. I'd have to respect you first, duh.

But in spite of his resistance, Stiles knows it's only a matter of time before Rudy joins in and he'll be lost. Gunner steps forward, frighteningly unreadable behind his mask, and without prelude, punches him savagely, straight in the face. Stiles nearly collapses, staggers, gasping, violently nauseated by the sudden pain, the crack of his nose breaking. Temporarily blinded by agony, he presses his hands to his face and the world stops as he tries to catch his breath, wheezing, struggling to get air through the unyielding constriction of the collar. And then... when the tears are involuntary, but spilling over his lids and down his cheeks nonetheless... that's when Rudy steps in.

He holds the camera in front of him still, but he and Gunner have gotten pretty coordinated with the dual Domming. "Kneel, Kneel," they chant, goading him until the room grows slippy and blurred, until his body cringes with the need to please and that part of Stiles that is proud of his resistance is subsumed, pressed into the background, until all he feels is the surging of his blood and the intense need to submit. He drops to his knees.

Down the stairs, Stiles can hear the recorded *smack, smack, smack* of a cane beating into flesh. His newly foxy ears flicker forward, easily catalog the choking, the stuttering breaths, the desperate gasps that accompany each thud. Like flashes of a poorly suppressed nightmare, his body jerks with the sense-memory of the rain of cracking, knife-edged lashes.

Stiles grabs at his giant, furry ears with trembling hands, tugging them down in a vain attempt to muffle the sounds that are spilling up the stairs. He pushes his forearms over his face, presses himself against the stairwell wall. He is in a place he's known since infancy... and he doesn't feel safe. Those bastard hunters are *dead*: he watched it happen and he *enjoyed* it.

But there are more of them out there.

He hears the scraping sound that was Stiles-in-the-collar trying to groan. His memory of the beating is actually very blurred, he'd been held so far down under. Mostly he recalls intense confusion: he was trying so hard to be *good*, trying to do what they said, why did they keep hurting him? What could he do to make it better? At their sneering commands, he'd taken off his pants, put his underwear on his head, crawled around in circles, handed the whip from one to the other and held still for his beating, but nothing was working, and the thought that he was failing at pleasing them burned like acid under his skin, and the tears kept falling, scalding his face, mixing with blood and snot.

One of them held his phone up, and Stiles knew that was supposed to mean something, but he couldn't... couldn't remember what, and was this why they were so angry and kept hurting him? Nothing fit together right, he was all pain and jagged edges, drowning in fear and the vertiginous sense that everything was wrong, so very wrong.

Stiles clings to the banister, disoriented and cold to his bones. Everything has the texture of horror: fear and doom, time being frozen and his body swathed in ice, unable to move. Downstairs, the monotonous sound of Rudy's laughter jolts here-and-now-Stiles out of his paralysis. "Better catch it," Gunner taunts, and Stiles remembers them throwing nuts at him, hitting him when he couldn't catch them in his mouth, demanding that he beg.

Both his father's and Argent's heartbeats are deafening and rapid. A pen scratches on paper: someone is taking fucking notes. "Lord have mercy," Chris murmurs under his breath. "I'll kill them." He sounds *agonized*.

John's breathing has tiny little sobs in it that probably only Stiles can hear, and he suddenly can't take anymore. The remembered fugue of submission, the desperation to appease, the terror of failure and the endless agony of a beating – skin hot and sticky with blood – plus the verbal derision contrasts nauseatingly with his current fury and humiliation. He succumbs to the animal need to run, to find safety, a covert in which to regroup.

Stiles edges down the stairs, as silently as he can, a shadow. He darts down the hall to the back door, opens it a crack, and then melts into his fox form as easily as a sigh, or a sob. He fights his way free of the quagmire his clothes have become and races out of the opened door, consumed by the need to run... to run... to find a safe den and hide.

He tears across his own backyard, crosses Mrs. Ackerman's, skids across Wimbledon (thankfully free of cars), creeps through Mrs. de Silva's messy *Acuba* hedge and into the Schaatz yard. Their cat hisses warningly from the porch, larger than Stiles in this form; and Stiles prudently changes course, aiming for the Joliet's, whose dog is safely chained in the back. And thusly he runs, not so much *toward* as *away*. Yard by yard, one street to another, skittering through shadows and shrubbery until some twenty minutes later (or, you know, maybe a day and a half) he spills out on Honeysuckle, next to the pharmacy.

He feels better already, the shame and fear that he felt as a human becomes numbed and distant in his animal brain, which is far more preoccupied with the smells of exhaust and fried foods and

birds and the near-overwhelming perfumes of the people on the sidewalk. A woman nearby makes a comment about the darling little animal, and Stiles runs again.

A few more turns and he's in the little park off Main Street. It occurs to him that he has no idea how to find Derek, and that if he shifts he'll be starkers, so that's right out. He slinks, panting, under the band gazebo, decrepit and abandoned in the stark winter, and growls at two squirrels playing there. They cede the territory, and Stiles huffs in primitive victory.

Stiles hears a little boy trying to convince his father that Pikachu just ran past and is hiding under that porch. The father gives an affable reply that means he's not really listening, but Stiles still backs up until he hits the central beam. He can feel all his fur standing on end.

This is stupid. This whole freak-out is stupid, and if he were human, he'd kick himself for running away like that. He's not really feeling *guilty*, per se, but he is realizing that his only option is basically to get safely back home without getting grabbed up by a passer-by or, even worse, animal control. It's full daylight, and people are milling around Beacon Hills' small town square, and there's not really a good place to hide.

As he curls there, more or less thinking he'll just hunker down and wait until dark, he hears quick footsteps rattling the wooden planks of the gazebo overhead and a familiar voice.

“—only a small inconvenience, sir. We just need an additional week to be certain that everything is perfect for you, that's all. There was a problem with locating the perfect specimen—”

Stiles goes rigid. He's lifted onto his toes, hair raised, body quivering with adrenaline-flooded hypervigilance. The woman speaking is unmistakably Laxmi, and his new animal senses register her as a predator, in spite of the soft, earthy smell of her perfume. Under that she's all wolfsbane and cold steel; ruthless and glacial. But right now she also reeks of nerves, with rapid heart and the clicking of fingernails drumming on the bench next to her thigh. Her heart does a familiar leap and stutter combo, and Stiles' new senses tell him *lie*.

The voice on the other end is easy to make out, a rich baritone with some kind of slow British drawl. “I've changed my flight once already, Laxmi. I'm not of a mind to do it again. The situation is time-sensitive, as *you knew when I contracted you*. If you are unable to follow through, you should have just said so. I would, of course, be happy to get out the word—”

“No, sir! We'll deliver as promised. It will all be ready for you Monday next, I promise. I'll have Baron pick you both at the airport and bring you straight in. And we'll... make arrangements... to keep you both comfortable.”

“I certainly hope so, Miss Laxmi. There is a small fortune riding on this, and more besides, as you well know. I am not keen to experience further disappointment or delay.”

“Yes, sir. We'll be ready for you.”

The man on the other end of the line vanishes without a click, but Stiles can hear a finger squeaking across a screen as the call is disconnected on Laxmi's end. His heart is beating in a frenzy. Jesus. It isn't safe. He quivers as he waits. A few feet above his head, Laxmi rapidly texts someone, and he hears her growl softly in the back of her throat. The metallic smell of frustration and trepidation sifts through the cracks in the floorboards.

He waits for an endless minute after she makes her way back down the stairs before poking his sharp little nose through the latticework disguising the gazebo crawlspace. He can see her marching off, and wiggles out of a small hole to start running in the opposite direction.

“What—” says a deep voice belonging to a pair of feet he dodges past, and the smell of aconite and tobacco come to life around him like a cloud. Stiles realizes he’s run straight into Baron. Utterly panicked, he makes a hard right and takes off again. The ear-wracking clatter of the bell over the door of the City Perk nudges him to the left, and instinctively he launches himself at something vaguely familiar.

Red boots with spiky heels, slim legs and a poofy short skirt, a veritable storm of Chanel No. 5 - that his werefox nose registers as *chemical, chemical, whoa musk I feel a little aroused right now...*. He’s found Lydia. He’s *staring up Lydia’s skirt!*

He doesn’t dwell on that, however. He immediately whines, a passable sound, even if it’s still a little scratchy. His tail is clamped between his legs, and he stares up at her beseechingly, making his eyes as wide and limpid as he can. Although he’s always thought of Lydia as more of a military general than a girly-girl (in spite of her best efforts to present herself as vacuous: she calls herself neutral, but Stiles instinctively reads her as Domme), he’s hoping to play on her softer emotions.

She immediately stoops down, cooing and reaching out a hand, and Stiles smirks, *Yeah, yeah, I got it, I’m so adorable, no one can resist me*. He ignores her little murmurs (*oh, so cute, tiny fox, no collar, lalala*) and peers instead down the sidewalk at Baron. Baron can’t possibly know that this is Stiles, but he makes eye contact and lengthens his already ground-eating stride, weaving through other pedestrians. Stiles panics a little, whimpers and, looking frantically around for a refuge, jumps into Lydia’s enormous purse, wiggling around to make a place for himself.

As Baron comes closer, Stiles whines and shakes, pulling himself smaller and smaller into the bag. Lydia, who startled and then huffed an almost silent laugh when he’d entered her purse, demonstrates her formidable intelligence at this point. Her assessing glance bounces from Stiles to the big man and back, and the fox’s distress is palpable. She swiftly stands upright, shifting her bag on her shoulder and putting one hand gently on Stiles’ head, pushing him down.

“You’re scared, huh. Are you in trouble?” She doesn’t wait for an answer but decisively swings around on one perilous heel and re-enters the coffeeshop, sweeping quickly (and majestically, because: Lydia!) to the restroom in the back. Inside, she locks the door and fishes past Stiles to wrap her fingers around her phone. She pets his ears as she pulls it out, and then sets the bag (and Stiles) on the counter before texting.

While waiting for a reply, she opens her bag a little around Stiles, giving him a more thorough examination, which Stiles tolerates with a minimum of cringing and growls. “Someone’s been abusing you,” she says finally, fingers feather-light on the bare strip around his neck. There’s a loud knock at the door, and Lydia blinks slowly before calling out, voice in the high pitch she adopts when she wants the listener to believe she’s completely vapid, “Oh, so sorry! I’ll be a few minutes, okay?” Stiles can smell the hunter, curls of aconite and tobacco stretching fingers under the door, and pulls into himself, shivering.

Lydia lifts a brow, answers an incoming text on the phone, asks, “Is that your owner out there? You certainly act as if it is....”

She puts one hand over his back, and even Lydia’s small hand can reach from neck to tail in Stiles’ teeny little form, before lifting her phone to her ear. There are a couple of rings, and a voice

answers, “City Perk, how can I jazz up your day?” Stiles has the disorienting sensation of listening to that voice from two different places, slightly offset, since he can hear it clearly from the phone as well as from the front counter of the shop.

“Yes, hello, “Lydia’s voice has become brisk. “I’m a customer here, and am trapped in your restroom by a man who’s been harassing me. Could you please get him away from the door so that I can slip out through the back to meet my ride?”

“What? Really?” the girl who answered doesn’t sound any older than Lydia and Stiles are, and her diffident inflection marks her as a sub. “Oh, my god. That’s. Oh, well, yes, of course. Are you alright? Hold on just a minute, okay, and I’ll … um. What should I do?”

Lydia sighs, as if timidity and incompetence go hand in hand. “Why don’t you tell him you have a call for a customer described as large and blond? That should get him. And then when he’s at the counter, just say the call has been disconnected. I’ll be outside by then.”

“Oh! Oh, that’s a good idea. Okay. I’ll, um, knock on the door when we’re leaving, okay? Do you need anything else? The police or anything?”

“I’ll be fine, thank you. Just get him to the front of the store for me.”

“Of course. I’ll just be a minute.” Now that Stiles can focus on the girl’s actual voice, rather than the one through the speaker, he can hear that her heart beat is pounding wildly. Poor kid. But she bravely comes to the back, and they hear her tell the man she thinks there’s a call for him up at the counter. Baron sounds suspicious, but follows her regardless, and there’s the faintest tap as they withdraw.

Lydia bundles up her bag, and Stiles, and is out the door in a flash, glancing only once over her shoulder. Stiles peeks out, and sees the man leaning impatiently on the counter while the barista fumbles with the phone. The hunter doesn’t see them slip away. Lydia wraps her hand around Stiles’ head, pushing it down a little, but not before he sees a familiar silver Porsche waiting in the back lot.

Lydia sinks gracefully into the car and puts her bag neatly by her feet.

“Hey, babe.” It’s Jackson’s smarmy voice. “Where’s my latte?”

“I didn’t get it,” Lydia replies, and she suddenly sounds wan and fragile. “I started feeling bad. Could you just take me home, Jackson? I think I really need to lie down. My head. . .”

There’s more conversation, but Stiles tunes it out, focusing instead on trying to relax for the first time in what feels like hours.

It’s kind of nice to be in Lydia’s gigantic purse. It’s dark and safe and close, and it smells like Lydia, which Stiles has always associated with *good things* (despite the fact that Lydia usually cuts him dead whenever he makes an effort to get her attention or give her a compliment).

Stiles applauds himself that those days of puppy love and unrequited desperation are over, however. His time in captivity has matured him and put his childhood crush on Lydia into perspective. She can’t hold a candle to Derek. Although that doesn’t make her accomplishments or character any less prodigious.

Lydia crosses her legs and arranges them to limit Jackson's view of her bag. Stiles pokes his nose out but she puts her hand on his head again, pushing gently down. Stiles subsides on the firm guidance, feeling the sub part of him comforted. Lydia broadcasts in multiple ways that she's in charge of the situation and that Stiles is safe. He rests his nose on his paws, stirs enough to curl himself so that his tail is wrapped around all four feet and his muzzle, and settles.

Now that he's relaxed, his brain starts working again, on a level other than pure survival. He squeezes his eyes tightly shut (the closest he can get, in the close confines of the purse, to *ye olde headdesk* routine) when he remembers the bond. *The bond!* It's only been an hour or so since he used it to communicate with Derek, albeit wordlessly, and he's a little appalled at himself that he hadn't considered using it again to help him with his current situation. Ah, panic. It makes a man stupid, that's for sure.

Now that he's able to focus, he feels it pulsing with anxiety and a certain protective aggression. Derek, Stiles gathers, is very worried for him and would have liked some feedback a bit sooner. Stiles is perplexingly both mortified and gratified to realize that Derek is responding to his extended panic. There's a tugging sensation, and Stiles knows that Derek is trying to find him.

If he were human, he'd be red as a beet. *Why didn't he think to use the bond?* He could have 'called' Derek from outside under a bush. He could have stayed right next to his house and this would never have happened.

All he had wanted to do was to escape the pain of memories and to get away from Mr. Argent, knowing he'd ask uncomfortable questions. Knowing he'd want to *see*, and Stiles didn't want to be *Exhibit A for the Torture of Subs*. Regardless, Stiles had options other than sprinting clear downtown, running into his captors, freaking out, and dragging Lydia into it. He stewed in guilt for a minute, at that last thought, thinking that Baron saw Lydia and might associate her with Stiles; that Stiles might have unwittingly put her in danger. He also broods about how Baron seemed to think the fennec fox was worthy of his focus, and why, *why???* How could he possibly know?



Chapter End Notes

Uh oh. Stiles got himself into a pretty pickle this time, didn't he? Although I think that the stress of being out in the world might be good insofar as he doesn't have the leisure to dwell on reliving what happened in the video, right? Can you imagine what Chris Argent must have been thinking when he saw it? That was really intense: I bet he was totally unprepared.

I am feeling much better this week, y'all. Thank you so much for all your kind words and support: that just... really made me feel good. It was a terribly frightening ordeal, and it was so cathartic to be able to share it with y'all, so *thank you!* I'm still sluggish and feeble, though (because recovery is always slower than you want it to be, dammit) so I've been reading lots of fic, which doesn't actually require a fully functional brain, and this is to your benefit, because I've got some recs for you. Yay!

[Those Hidden Places](#) by [Mimiminaj](#) A delicious prison AU that is actually pretty fluffy. (The non-con gets headed off before anything terrible happens, if that would have stopped you. Although you're reading *this*, so probably you'd have been fine with it.) Really enjoyable: sweet and hot and touching. It's all Derek POV, and watching Stiles flail and ramble and (eventually) flirt from his perspective is a joy.

[**Is That A Wand In Your Pocket Or?**](#) by [reptilianraven](#) The one where Stiles is a magician who performs at kids' birthday parties and Derek is a shy single dad baker who can't stop seeing Stiles everywhere. There are also dead bodies popping up every other day, but Stiles really doesn't need to know about that, so naturally, Stiles pops up at the crime scenes too. Fantastic. ***Alright. I just stumbled across this author and I'm head over heels. I spent a few days reading everything and bookmarking most of it. And the fact that they're primarily rated G and T and I got sucked in even without the Explicit (which rarely happens) ought to tell you something about how lovely these stories are.

[**The foul rag and bone shop of the heart**](#) by [WritersAreLiars](#) A Steter: entirely delightful and unique... author creates a fantastic world and Stiles' blithe disregard for traditions works very well with Peter's scheming. Worth reading even if it's never finished... but it probably will be, since the last post was current. WIP.

I was also cruising "buried alive" (which finds more than the tag #buried alive, fyi) and found tons of awesome stories, although most of them weren't Teen Wolf. So if you're into that,

[**Down Where It's Tangled and Dark**](#) by [stilinskisparkles](#) This one is a riot, (stilinskisparkles always makes me happy). Stiles simply canNOT shut up, and Derek, well, he has a Stiles thing, so it's okay, really. Cute and funny, which is weird, since it's about being buried alive, heh.

[**The Price of Gold \(Buried Alive\)**](#) by [paranoid_fridge](#) The Hobbit. This one is epic, and really wonderful. Boy, did Thorin fuck up, and wow, is Bilbo paying a steep price. It's pretty gut-wrenching, but there's a happy ending.

[**These Breaths We Breathe**](#) by [kayura_sanada](#) Merlin. An unexpected gem! Inspired by absolutely gorgeous (and soul-wrecking) [art](#), the author gathers steam and proceeds with a multi-part epic that begins with Merlin's magic being discovered and himself walled living in a tomb; to placing himself in a death-like suspended animation to protect himself while Arthur must find a way to heal him; to, finally, being exiled from the kingdom while Arthur attempts to straighten it all out. Uther is a deliciously unrepentant monster, which is quite satisfying, and there's lots of angst, pining, h/c, whump and a bit of sex here and there.

A Rescue

Chapter Notes

I have now been posting this officially for one year, can you believe it? It was actually a year to the very day when I posted Chapter 25, but I forgot to say so. Oops. So let's celebrate now instead! Y'all have been so good to me, and I'm consistently astonished at the number of kudos (3200!) and bookmarks (910... what. even.) and comments and, just... he love and encouragement that y'all spill over with in response to every chapter. *I LOVE EVERYONE IN THIS BAR!*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Derek rubs his hand on his chest for the third time. He's come back downstairs after his experience with Stiles through their bond, so relaxed he was almost smiling, basking in a lulling eddy of satiated domspace. His betas are all in the large living space. The television is on, turned low, some travel documentary, but it doesn't matter, because no one's watching.

In contrast to the occasionally bitter emotional upheaval of the past week (which Derek is sure reflects the betas' jealousy over Stiles' demands on his time and uncertainty about the pack structure), they are currently reflecting Derek's quiet contentment, whether knowingly or not. Erica is sprawled across Boyd's lap, eyes half-closed like a cat as he strokes out her hair until it's a shining waterfall down his knees. Boyd is smiling faintly at Isaac, who is knitting again, something soft and green, curled up under Erica's outflung calves, carefully arranging his yarn so it won't get snagged in the myriad buckles of her boots.

Wandering past them into the kitchen, Derek pauses to grasp the lintel of the door, hauling himself into a few impromptu pull-ups before continuing on to start up a pot of coffee – although it's after two, and Isaac will drink it even if it means he won't sleep well tonight. Meh. It's the weekend: no one has to get up early.

Derek feels pleasantly stoked with energy, the soft, thrumming kind, that lies in reserve for when it's needed. He'd never experienced anything through the bond like what he just did with Stiles, pouring himself through their gossamer connection in an almost physical way; giving and receiving thoughts and impressions. He quietly marvels at the way the resonance between them had felt nearly physical. His palms had tingled with the sensation of Stiles' narrow wrists caught in his grasp; his chest felt heavy with the weight he could apply to Stiles, pushing him down, holding him still. He could feel the phantom texture of Stiles' silky skin; smell the memory of his hair, shampoo and citrus and soft animal.

In a few minutes, he joins his betas on the couch with his mug in his hand, scooping Erica aside enough to settle himself in the middle of the group, whereupon she immediately drapes herself across all three again. They don't speak, just lean agreeably against one another, soaking in one another's touch, still soothing the emotional hurts incurred from their long and harrowing separation. The television flashes images of lush forest and distinctly Asian pagoda temples, a serene backdrop. Isaac's needles click in a soothing, regular rhythm. It might be the first time since Derek returned that they are all so tranquil and connected.

Derek sinks lower, throws an arm each over the shoulders of Boyd and Isaac, stroking his hand across their hair and necks. Scenting his pack. Isaac curls into his side, letting his knitting project sink into his lap, laying his head on Derek's shoulder and sighing lightly. It's good, this is so good. All it lacks is Stiles, but since he made an appearance not fifteen minutes earlier, albeit in a private, more virtual way, Derek doesn't feel too fussed.

He's scarcely halfway done with his coffee (and that includes Isaac stealing sips) before his serenity begins to slip, and some ten minute after that, Derek feels noticeably agitated. At this point, he can associate it with the packbonds, and Stiles' is twanging with distress. Derek unwinds his fingers from Isaac's curls to put his hand over his chest, eyes closed, probing inward. But unlike earlier, this feels like a one-way call... and he can communicate with Stiles right now no more than he can communicate with a message left on the phone. He tries to send calm, reassurance, but there is no reception on the other end: Stiles is clearly too distracted.

Then the panic spikes, a violent spate of fear and shame so intense that Derek is on his feet before he knows it, Erica sliding down to the floor. The pack rises around him, just as distressed although they don't know why.

"Derek, what is it?" Erica asks. She claws one hand around Boyd's arm as he hauls her up. Boyd stands alertly, waiting for instruction. Isaac clutches his knitting, blue eyes wide, watching them all.

Without warning, the flavor of the bond shifts from human to animal. But although the sense of shame has faded a bit in that transition, the frantic feelings fear and danger, the intense need to *run* and *hide*, are the same. "Stiles," he answers. "It's Stiles. He's in trouble."

When he refocuses his eyes, Isaac hands him his keys and Erica tosses his jacket his way. Boyd has the loft door open already, and they all run down to the car, off to rescue their packmate, and Derek is pleased that his pack is comprised of good people. Because he knows they feel wary of Stiles, a little jealous of his sudden insertion into their pack, and yet, they're immediately ready to go find the boy, to make sure that he is safe.

They head first for Stiles' house, but as they near it, Derek gets the nagging feeling that the sub is not there, feels a tugging sensation in the other direction as he steers the Camaro around corners, barely pausing at the stop signs in the quiet neighborhood streets.

He hesitates for only a moment before deciding to trust his instinct, turning around in the Stilinski driveway and tearing off in the other direction. The betas don't question it, just wait silently, but he can feel their tension, their desire to hurry up the drive, to get to Stiles.

The downtown square is crowded, and Derek can't find parking, so he just pulls over long enough to slide out, telling Boyd, "Drive around, find parking, I'll call you as soon as I know anything."

He stands on the green, inhaling deeply as the Camaro glides away, letting his mouth drop open a bit to detect and enhance any nuance available. It only takes a moment before he can sift through all the different odors and isolate Stiles, the smell of his fur, his fear, his shock. He follows the scent trail to the gazebo in the center of the little park, mounting the steps to wander in a short circle, even though it's unnecessary, because his nose has already given him enough information.

To his shock, he can detect the unmistakable and worrisome presence of Laxmi: she had been on this bench here. The distinctive mixture of her perfume combined with more typical hunter notes of

guns and wolfsbane lingers on the air: it hasn't been more than 20 minutes since she sat here and then departed.

Derek's eyes flicker red as he stares down at the weathered floorboards. Stiles had hidden underneath them, probably. His scent is as fresh as Laxmi's: they were here at the same time. Derek doesn't know what sent Stiles running, but he doubts it was the huntress. She likely hadn't even known Stiles was here or Derek's nose would be telling a different story. The woman's scent trail is direct: up the steps, over to the bench, lingered for a while, and then right back down and to the left.

The trails diverge at the base of the gazebo. Stiles had definitely gone right, wisely choosing the opposite direction from Laxmi. His signature tang of ginger and lime is woven in with warm, dusty animal hair, confirming that he wasn't human half an hour ago... in case Derek had had any doubts.

Nostrils flaring, mouth ever so slightly dropped, Derek turns right. Weekend pedestrians melt out of his way, after just one look at the intense expression on his face, his looming height and leather jacket; they instinctively recognize they've just encountered a Dom much further up the food chain than they, and quickly step aside. Derek stalks past them, accepting it as his due, not thinking of this phenomenon any more than it impacts him on his search by making it somewhat faster and easier.

Stiles' trail intersects with Baron in front of a coffee shop, and both appear to have gone inside. Derek shoves clenched fists into his jacket pockets, briefly stalled in his consternation. Why are both hunters downtown? Are they searching for Stiles? Derek? The Sheriff? This definitely doesn't feel like coincidence. He looks forward to confronting the bastards, but he'd rather it be in a less public venue, where he can gut them both at his leisure.

Derek sniffs around cautiously before entering. He doesn't want any surprises; he'd really rather find Stiles than meet the hunters at this juncture, surrounded by so many people. Baron's trail is maybe fifteen minutes old, and it wafts on the air in both directions: the man had entered and left. Stiles, however, has no exit sillage.

Derek realizes he should probably call the Sheriff and tell him that their quarry is downtown, that Stiles is here as well, but the agitating scent of Stiles' desperation convinces him to put that aside for later. Also, there's the not insignificant concern that such a conversation would turn into him berating the man for not calling him... if he even knows yet that Stiles is missing.

The scent trail in the coffeeshop confusingly leads directly into the women's restroom. Derek throws discretion to the winds without a second thought, and opens the door to check it out.

Another deep breath. Evidently Stiles had been on the bathroom counter? How would he even get up here? There are too many other competing smells to sort out what happened; Derek is hampered by the sting of bleach and urine and perfume. Many women have been in and out, and it's impossible to tell by his nose alone if one of them had interacted with the little fox.

Leaving the restroom leads Derek through the back of the shop and into an alleyway. Here, the trail disappears. But a light, musky fragrance he recognizes from the bathroom is here as well, incongruous in the rank nasal cacophony of the alleyway, and Derek figures he has a clue. Probably, Stiles had been taken away by a woman in a car, here. Someone who had had him in the bathroom. Derek returns briefly to the bathroom, glaring at a young Domme mother who was about to enter until she shrinks away with a scowl. (He certainly doesn't want to wait until the smell of

the tiny room has been further contaminated with the dirty diaper he can already detect.) He inhales deeply, memorizing the female scent, isolating it from the others.

Curiously, from Stiles, he can still smell fear and desperation... but also a cool tinge of relief. Interesting.

Derek leaves, ignoring the puzzled (and hostile) stares he gets as he goes.

A quick call to Boyd and he's back in the Camaro, absently waving his second back into the passenger seat. Ignoring the traffic accumulating behind them, he closes his eyes and *feels*. There's the ephemeral connection, bright and humming: it has grown into the strongest bond he has, the one that is the easiest to locate and decode. Derek shies away from discerning what that means.

He concentrates, breath slow and quiet. Reaches into his inner self, settles with the wolf, feels out the web of bonds anchored within him. The sense of Stiles is vivid, vibrating with confusion and discomfort; the panic has receded, although not vanished. Does this mean he is with someone he trusts?

Derek lets himself sink further into the sensation, feels the ripple along his skin as the desire to shift flows over him. Feels the lengthening points of his teeth, the tightening at his temples, the curl of his fists. Feels it and lets it pass. For now, he must remain human. But the bond... he can follow, stroking metaphysical fingers along the filament, plucking on it just to hear the fine tone of a rung note. The essence of Stiles is vividly woven through it: quick and sly, loyal and brave, impudent and curious.... How can Derek know him so well, when the boy has never been able to speak a single word?

As if he can smell it, see it, hear it, the bond stretches eastward. So Derek follows.

In less than a quarter of an hour, he comes to a stop on a winding street lined with large houses. He lowers the window and breathes in. One of the homes is saturated in the female's scent, he can isolate it from halfway down the block. He leaves the Camaro where it is, ordering the betas to stay with a mere glance (enhanced with some eyebrow locution) and strides to the door. He hesitates at the top step of the small porch, listening. There are two heartbeats inside. One is Stiles', going a million beats per minute. The other must belong to the woman.

Through the bond Derek can feel that Stiles isn't afraid. He seems relaxed and... smug? It's hard to tell, but Derek is confident enough in Stiles' sense of security to knock on the door rather than kicking it down. He'll try this the easy way, first.

He hammers at the knocker with impatient authority, and then steps back a pace, arms crossed. He removes his sunglasses. Erica always says his resting face makes him look like a serial killer, so he tries to arrange it into something more approachable, masquerading as harmless in spite of the adrenaline thundering through his blood.

When sharp heels tap a path to the door, he smiles winningly through the glass, relaxes his arms and shoves his hands in his back pockets. *Aw, shucks.* He doesn't use body language much, but he knows how to manipulate it when necessary.

The door opens slightly, and a short, very young, redhead Domme stares out, eyes much more cool and suspicious than her youth would suggest. One delicately shaped brow arches in inquiry.

"Hi," he says, tone light. "My name is Derek, and I've lost my—" that's all he has the chance for before Stiles comes racing down the hall, toenails clicking, and darts past the door to launch himself at Derek. Derek scoops him up immediately. "Stiles," he murmurs under his breath, bringing the warm body of the fennec fox up to his face so he can rub his cheek against one furry ear. The relief he feels is amplified by Stiles' own, echoing up the bond, until he's nearly dizzy with it.

Stiles emits truly ear-piercing little shrieks of joy, causing both Derek and the Domme to wince, and his purr revs up and grows in strength and volume. Derek hums and murmurs back, wordless sounds of affection, momentarily oblivious to their observer. He is fiercely grateful to have Stiles back safe and unharmed after an hour of chasing him guided by nothing more than a few scent trails and their growing bond, used in a way he'd never even heard of, much less attempted.

(He's frankly amazed that it has directed him to Stiles with such precision... and later he will wonder if he'd known about this before his capture, if he'd taught it to his betas, how different things would be. What might Stiles have been spared, if his pack had been able to find Derek within hours of the kidnapping? Do bonds even work this way with betas? Communication this intense could be exclusive to a mate bond. Either way, it is spilled milk, as they say. Derek has had a lot of practice avoiding *what if* scenarios.)

When Derek emerges from their inordinately demonstrative reunion, he becomes aware once more of the young lady. She has leaned herself against the doorframe, arms crossed and eyes shrewdly assessing, although a tiny curl of her lip betrays her enjoyment of seeing such a large, and intimidating man reduced to nuzzling and cooing over his tiny pet: the sharp cut of his cheekbones, heavy eyebrows and dark stubble contrasts preposterously with the fluffy fur, gigantic ears and joyfully wiggling body he holds unselfconsciously against his face.

Stiles smells like himself, but also like the young lady, the same musky-floral scent is worked into his fur and Derek growls softly at the thought that she seems to have had her hands all over him.

"Stiles," the girl says thoughtfully.

Derek freezes. As does Stiles. Both of them slowly look up, identical expressions of *oh shit* on their faces, before Derek's face blanks as though wiped with an eraser. He warily lowers Stiles to chest height, tensing and freeing up one hand. His eyebrows promise doom and retribution.

Their ears are suddenly filled with the escalated pounding of her heart, as she recognizes danger whether consciously or not; but her relaxed posture doesn't change, nor does her expression. Derek is reluctantly impressed with her control.

"That's an unusual name."

Derek hears the sound of his car doors open and close as the betas exit and hurry down the sidewalk, sensing his sudden apprehension or hearing his heart leap and stutter.

"And a fennec fox is quite an exotic pet," she continues in the arctic silence.

Erica, Boyd and Isaac slink menacingly up the front walk and array themselves behind their Alpha. They are forgetting to act human, and move with a striking, and intimidating, feral grace. Lydia's eyes widen almost comically, and her nonchalant pose loses some of its effortlessness. Her crossed arms tense as she curls her hands into fists, hidden behind her slender biceps.

"Hello," she says slowly. "Vernon. Erica." She regards Isaac for a beat, brain clearly working through her catalog of schoolmates, before saying, "Isaac." She looks back at Derek. "Well," she straightens. "I know everyone here, now." (Derek hears heavy subtext in that sentence, and gamely ignores it.) "My name is Lydia." Her eyes dart back to the betas, whose formation is definitely aggressive and blatantly hawkish.

There's an awkward interval of prolonged silence, as Lydia holds Derek's stare and Derek tries to decide what she knows and if she's a threat. The hammer of her heart and the chlorinated burn of her fear overwhelm his senses.

Then, suddenly, Stiles relaxes, resting his head against Derek's arm, bright black eyes and sail-like ears still trained on Lydia. He lets his tongue loll out in a canid grin and his purr starts up again.

One ear flops sideways, deliberately goofy. It's the knife that cuts through the tension. Derek suddenly realizes he's staring down a 16-year-old, Domme though she may be, and rolls his eyes skyward in some degree of chagrin. She's not an Alpha, and she's neither challenging nor threatening him. Erica and Boyd likewise relax, and Isaac relievedly follows suit.

"I read up on fennec foxes just now," Lydia continues, as though they hadn't had a fraught moment that verged on incipient violence. "The consensus is that they actually make quite poor pets, and are very difficult to tame."

All eyes shift to Stiles, who nestles happily in Derek's arms, purring and visibly calm: patently closely bonded with his 'owner'. Derek says nothing, not sure where Lydia is trying to lead the conversation, but unwilling to give anything away. His thick fingers stir through Stiles' fur, skate gently over the bald spot on his neck, and tug on his ears in one of his favorite gestures.

"How long have you had him?" Lydia persists.

Derek straightens up, irritated. He doesn't have to wait around to be grilled by a high schooler. "We'll be going, now," he says abruptly, aware of, and fully uncaring, how rude he sounds.

As he turns away, Lydia says, heart still pounding but voice low and steady, "That fox needs a collar. Perhaps a kinder one than you had on him before."

Derek doesn't turn, although Stiles leans around his arm to stare back as he is carried away. The betas wheel as one and follow them to the car.

They're all piling into it before Derek hears the click of her door close, the muffled tapping of her heels as she retreats into her house.

"John?"

"Oh, my god, *Hale*, it's about time you called back—"

Derek makes an impatient noise. "I have Stiles. He'd gotten picked up by a girl downtown. What set him off?"

"You have him? Oh, thank fuck. Is he a... is he... *changed*? We found the door open and a pile of clothes—"

"Yes, sir," Derek interrupts again. "You should have called me right away. What set him off?"

"I don't really know," John answers, but his heart blips even over the phone, and Derek just waits for the truth. "Argent came over and. He wanted to see the video. I didn't. Stiles was upstairs. His door was shut, I thought he was asleep. I didn't even think he'd know about it."

Derek would close his eyes and pinch the bridge of his nose if he weren't driving and simultaneously on the phone. But his fingers still twitch with the impulse. "Alright," he says, after a pause. "I'm bringing him back to the loft for a while. He needs to feel safe." That's a dig, and John will know it. But the man doesn't have any grounds to argue, at this time. Obviously Stiles hadn't felt safe at his home, or he wouldn't have gone running out into town. The fact that he'd apparently stood by the door, opened it, removed his clothing and shifted after doing that, something so *clearly* premeditated, was something Derek would want to think about later. He doesn't want to imagine how Stiles must have felt, hearing the video (which he would have heard easily from anywhere in the house, with his magnificent ears), reliving that torment.

Stiles shivers in his arms, and his ears flatten, which gives him a tragic and touching combination of *sad* and *adorable*. Derek suspects that if Stiles ever figures that out, he'll use it remorselessly.



"I'll call you this evening," Derek says abruptly, and then disconnects the call before John has a chance to say goodbye. He doesn't want to agitate Stiles any more than he already is, doesn't want to bring back that panic and helplessness that the bond had transmitted to him just an hour earlier. He strokes Stiles' ears gently, in an effort to calm both of them, until he needs to use his hand for the gearshift again.

Astonishingly, the betas have been quiet up until this point. But now Erica wedges herself between the seats and tutts at the sight of Stiles' sideways ears. "Poor baby," she says. "You've been having a rough day, haven't you?" She reaches out to pet him, but Derek quickly and instinctively deflects, knocking her aim awry. He doesn't want anyone else touching Stiles right now, finds his hackles already raised at the thought of that girl Lydia having rescued him when Derek wasn't there.

Derek isn't stupid. He knows the Domme's mind was ticking away behind the bored expression she'd held over her face like a mask. She suspected something, and had definitely honed in on Stiles' name. Derek hopes the truth will not occur to her: even if she thought about the missing sub, surely it was just too farfetched to make a connection. But as unlikely as it is, he feels unsettled

nonetheless, and curses himself for that first, uncensored, exhalation of intense relief that had been Stiles' name.

Erica grunts in frustration at being fended off. And this is something Derek is going to have to deal with as well.

Since Derek had gotten home, the betas had been more clingy than usual, especially because Derek hasn't been at their den that much, traveling around with John as he was. The two days he spent away from Stiles, focused on his betas, had helped a lot, but there is still a rift there. Particularly as none of the three had seen Stiles since the morning he'd left the loft to be returned home, although Derek often came home smelling of him, of John, of the Stilinski house. It is only natural that they respond as though their territory is being invaded.

The whole pack is rattled, and this isn't something that can continue. The puppies don't know where they stand anymore, their hierarchy in disarray; and when they'd needed their Alpha the most, following the long duration of his captivity, he'd seemingly abandoned them to spend his time instead with strangers.

Each of the three had responded characteristically. Erica became more aggressive, her confusion and uncertainty translated into anger and violence. Boyd became even more quiet and withdrawn. And Isaac had become increasingly worried and desperately affectionate, the scent of his imagined rejection subtly undermining everyone else's security.

Stiles doesn't seem to be picking up on any of this, although why he should, Derek isn't sure. Much of it has been building for days and days, although the betas had unhesitatingly piled into the Camaro with him when he'd suddenly taken off from the loft, feeling Stiles going ballistic across the bond.

When they arrive at the loft and Derek turns the car off, he sits in the silence, fingers drumming at the wheel, thinking. He takes out the keys and turns back to hand them to Erica. "I'll need a few hours to help Stiles with his shift," he says, keeping his eyes steady on hers before flicking them to Isaac and Boyd. "You go do your homework or something."

"It's Saturday," Isaac says in a small voice. Derek twists further to smile at him. He's tucked behind Derek's seat, knees up near his chest because they won't fit, looking more like a weregrasshopper than a werewolf.

Derek strokes the back of his fingers from Isaac's temple to his jaw, comforting. "Go to a park, then?" he suggests. "Just give me a little time, and then come back with pizza and we'll have a pack night." He tips to one side and reaches for his wallet, making Stiles shift over to his other thigh to keep his balance. He pulls out some plastic and hands it to Boyd. "Whatever you want for dinner," he reiterates. "I'll see you after six."

Boyd nods, and Erica flashes her eyes at him. The car is less redolent of worry and jealousy than it had been, but it still smells of a problem that needs fixing. Right now, however, Derek is nearly *shaking* with how much he needs Stiles against his skin, soaking in his scent. Needs the warmth of him between Derek's hands. Needs to reaffirm his claim, his dominance over the sub. Especially with the scent of the Domme smeared across his fur.

He slips from the car and takes the stairs three at a time, Stiles curled carefully against his chest, safe under his jacket. He hears the Camaro start up and drive off just as he lets himself through the

big rolling door. Some of the tension drains from his shoulders as soon as he locks it behind him. He sets Stiles on the thick rug in front of the sofa.

The little fox stares up at him without fear. Stiles' eyes are black in the dim lighting, shining and engaged. His ears perk forwards. Even his whiskers point at Derek. He is focused, and his intense, exclusionary absorption in his Dom makes Derek relax even further. Relax in a strange way, with a thrumming energy.

Derek stands in front of him. His skin feels plumped up the same way it would if he'd just gotten into a car that had been sitting out on a very hot day. The hairs on his arms stand out; his blood rushes through his veins, hot and insistent. He feels tall, and massive and powerful, gaze lost for a long minute in Stiles'. "Shift," he commands, and his voice is rough, as adamantine as he feels. Heavy. Anchored, like a mountain, with roots going deep into the core of the earth.

Stiles cocks his head to one side, as though considering the request. One ear bends forward, giving him a lopsided appearance, but neither he nor Derek are feeling silly at the moment. Derek breathes deeply and gets a lungful of pheromones, revealing that Stiles is as intrigued by his dominance as Derek is to be displaying it.

Derek's never been more aware of the give and take involved in Dominance and submission. Both sides have to accept it, have to want it; or you have nothing. But Derek and Stiles. Derek and Stiles have *something*, and it hums and buzzes, ricocheting, invisible, between them.

There's a shiver, and a blur, and then Stiles is crouched naked before him, balanced on his toes and hands. He shudders again, full body, and then blinks. His eyes are amber, now, some of their inner luminescence lost in the stark afternoon light. He waits, stabilizing himself on his fingertips, swaying slightly.

He's a terrible submissive. Doesn't look away at all, crouches as if in challenge.

He makes a beautiful animal.

Derek loves it.

"Kneel for me."

Stiles' eyes sweep down into another prolonged blink, and Derek has the impression that the slow drag of his lids could be a similar caress of his hands, brushing against Derek's skin wherever Stiles looks. Derek sucks in a shaky breath, and the warm, syrupy scent of arousal around them spikes. Stiles shifts to his knees, sits back on his haunches and rests his hands on his thighs. He still doesn't look away, and Derek doesn't want him to.

Derek takes half a step forward and stretches out a single finger, lets it rest on the front of Stiles' neck, just below the salience of his Adam's apple. He says nothing as he slowly moves around the sub, trailing his finger as he goes, until he's circled him completely. The skin he touches is pink and warm, marred with faint yellows and greens where some bruising has yet to entirely dissipate. Stiles gives no indication of pain: only anticipation, arousal, a certain *willingness* flooding the room and impelling Derek.

Derek drops down in front of Stiles, perching on his toes, ass resting on his suspended heels. Slowly, he circles Stiles' neck with both hands, thumbs in the hollow of his throat. "I want... to control you," he rasps. A part of him stands back and jeers, because that's his sex voice, and here

they are just standing in the main room, having barely touched at all. Another part says, *The boy is underage, and he's traumatized, and you need to return him to his father. None of this is fair to him.*

But Stiles is a long, deliciously tempting line of naked, folded before him. His lashes are nearly black, in spiky clumps around eyes that entrap Derek like the amber they resemble. His pupils are huge, his lush mouth dropped open (which makes Derek almost smile, because it's so characteristic). Moist puffs of air wash over Derek's throat, coming too fast to be anything but panting.

Stiles licks his lips, sassy and luscious, and then closes them up into a one-sided smirk. Both eyebrows lift: *I'd like to see you try, bubba.* It's all challenge and excitement. Derek inhales deeply, and there's no trace trepidation or fear, only the faintest undertone of nerves, which Derek attributes more to Stiles' probable inexperience with scening than anything else. He lets himself grin, toothy and voracious.

He drops his hands from around Stiles' neck and rises smoothly to his feet, stepping back a couple of paces so Stiles can have a good view. With one foot, he skids the coffee table further away, and Stiles jumps a little at the grating screech of it across the wood floor. Deliberately, he curls his hands around the hem of his shirt and peels it off. He can hear Stiles' smothered hiss of lascivious appreciation over his bared chest and smirks in turn, holding the fabric loosely in one hand while he pops a claw with the other.

Stiles eyebrows draw down in confusion, but Derek doesn't let him dwell on it, not hesitating as he rips a strip off the bottom of the shirt, cut in half so that he has a long ribbon of black cotton jersey draped over his fingers. He squats in front of Stiles again, buttressing himself against the distraction of all the naked, and lifts the strip. "I want to blindfold you," he says. "I don't want you distracted with anything but my touch. Tell me if that's not okay with you."

Stiles smiles at him, impish, and nods his head. But when Derek lifts the fabric to wrap it around his head, Stiles stops him. Long fingers wrap around his hands, and Derek sees Stiles' chest lift in a quick, bracing breath. He gathers Derek's strip of shirt under his nose, first, breathing deeply of Derek's scent.

And then Stiles guides Derek's hands to his neck, instead, heart racing and eyes full of timidity and unvoiced pleas.

Derek's mouth drops open, partly out of astonishment, partly to better revel in the pheromones Stiles is emitting, in the boy's determination and *want* and uncertainty, too. He sucks in air he'd previously forgotten all about, feeling dizzy with the crashing cascade of hormones set off by Stiles' actions, requesting Derek's scent-soaked marker around his neck. "You want my collar?" he asks, breathless.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I wasn't going to do recs this go-round, but I was just cruising #empathy and happened across a story I read years ago that I ADORE, [Fasten You to Me](#) by [nubianamy](#) and I'm so

excited I have to share. From my bookmark: “This story is so awesome, and surreal and frightening and sweet. Stiles is jogging in the park when suddenly reality... changes ... and all the people go falling into the sky. He straps himself to a root, manages to catch Derek, who’s wandering nearby, and then they spend the next three days together as the world disappears into a dense fog. They get to talk a lot, of course, and more than talk (and *score*, because Stiles has had a crush on him since he was a little kid! And if you can’t tap that at the end of the world, then when can you?) But every once in a while, Stiles goes cold, and there are no words in his mouth, only a song, and everything recedes, and that’s when Derek gets really scared and starts singing the Beatles in his dreadful off-tune voice, trying to combat Stiles’ song, trying to bring him back.” This story is a repost, but it’s still a travesty that it’s got only 128 kudos.

Collar and Epiphanies

Chapter Summary

WARNING!!! There is an extremely nsfw picture at the bottom of this chapter: do not read where your child, boyfriend or boss can look over your shoulder. (It fit so perfectly, I just had to do it.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You want my collar?” Derek asks, breathless.

Similarly winded, Stiles gives a shaky smile and nods. He voices a clear, affirmative hum, and hearing sound from Stiles is something Derek could never undervalue.

Derek grins: fierce, luminous and exultant. “Put your hands behind your back,” he commands.

Stiles’ lashes sweep down demurely, masking his gaze. Derek has had enough clues, at this point, to realize that Stiles and demure are likely mutually exclusive concepts, but he accepts the display for what it is. Stiles twines his fingers together at the small of his back, unconsciously fidgeting and restless, but Derek ignores that in favor of gravely folding the ragged strip of black T-shirt in two, holding the looped bit at the base of Stiles’ skull while he smoothly, ceremoniously, twists both tails across the front of Stiles’ neck. It is some two inches wide, meant to be a blindfold, and Derek gently positions it over the healing skin, hiding tender new flesh and fading bruises alike.

Stiles has lifted his head, is staring at him intently, as if he’s taking notes for later. Derek takes his time on the knot in the back, folding it into an intricate tangle, snug enough not to slip, but not tight enough to bring up bad memories or to choke or hurt. Two long ribbons of black curl down Stiles’ spine.

Derek keeps one hand on the knot and rests the other along the side of Stiles’ face, dipping down for a kiss, closing his eyes to focus on plump, glossy lips, the soft, humid warmth of Stiles’ breath. He thinks, a little shocked, that this may only be their second or third kiss, and mourns that he hasn’t spent more time just exploring Stiles’ kisses. So he nibbles, and licks, and sips, until Stiles is straining up against him. Obligingly, Derek sinks onto his heels and pulls Stiles in to straddle his lap, his thighs close around Derek’s hips, waist narrow and flat as it flexes under his hands.

Perched thusly, Stiles must tilt his head down to meet Derek’s lips, and he does so, eager and a little fumbling. Derek teases with chaste kisses before finally feeding him his tongue, licking inside to claim more of Stiles, dizzy and flying high on heat and lust and a pure, clean happiness stemming from the knowledge that he is latching his collar on the right person. The bond sings inside him, adding a bright, electric edge to their kiss. Derek can’t stop, sucking in damp flesh, the warm flavor of Stiles: his taste echoes the ginger and bergamot scent of him.

Stiles moans freely, the low, growling sounds exhilarating. Derek rises enough from his intoxication of arousal to recognize that Stiles is making noise more and more often, now, which can only bode well for the future. Derek growls back at him, the sounds of their voices muffled through tongue and lip and spit. Words don't matter at this point anyway: the give and take of their bodies communicates quite clearly, as Stiles alternates between yielding to Derek's guidance and lurching ahead to take what he wants, his inexperience resulting in bumping noses and tooth-marked lips.

His body rolls in a sinuous curve, small at first, unnoticed by himself, Derek thinks, but not by Derek, whose cock isn't oriented properly in his tight jeans for an erection to be anything but uncomfortable. Stiles' skin burns against his own, slowly producing a film of sweat, salty and piquant. Stiles rubs his nipples through the hair on Derek's chest: although Derek doesn't think he's doing it consciously, little hitches in his breath indicate how good he thinks it feels.

Derek twines one hand through the swaying tails of his shirt-cum-collar, dangling between sharp scapulae, and holds Stiles' gently rolling hip with the other. He tugs a little on the fabric, slitting his eyes open to be sure it doesn't hurt or scare the sub in his arms (*triggers, Derek, triggers*).

Stiles is pulled away from the kiss, head tipping back to follow the pressure of the collar. His eyes are still closed, cheeks flushed pink, parted lips and the skin around them shining with their mingled saliva. He groans, hands rubbing greedily and randomly over Derek's shoulders and biceps, the lavish curves of his pecs.

Derek does a little groping of his own, moving to cup the pert globe of Stiles' bare bottom as it thrusts against him, rubbing heedlessly against the rough denim of his jeans. Derek sinks his fingers in a bit, flesh pleasantly malleable, and imagines leaving little finger-shaped marks there some day: finger-bruises and love bites, because he can't wait to get his mouth on that succulent ass. He spreads his hands wide, nosing along Stiles neck, growing tense with excitement when he encounters the strip of his shirt around it, drenched in his scent and blatantly proclaiming his ownership. Stiles groans again, shudders and ruts, when Derek bites the muscle leading past the underside of his jaw.

Derek pulls back to lick over the faint prints of his teeth, moving to the other side to do the same. It is hard to hold back, to do everything so lightly as to not leave lasting marks, and he has the brief flash of a regret that Stiles doesn't heal as fast as a wolf, because he still feels like the body on his lap is fragile – although the soul it houses most demonstrably is *not* – and the Dom/Alpha in Derek preens that his mate is so responsive, so beautiful and strong, savage and resilient.

He slows Stiles down after a while, tugging gently on their improvised collar to still him, clamping a hand across the top of one thigh. It takes Stiles a moment to notice, and when he does, he stares down at Derek with annoyance, narrowed eyes and a distinctly frowny face, to which Derek has to consciously suppress his laughter. Stiles makes a sound that's the vocal equivalent to grabby hands, miffed and greedy, when Derek sets him back on his own knees, off Derek's lap.

Derek leans forward, bracing his hands on the sofa behind Stiles, trapping him between them, and can't resist leaning forward to suck on his ear, mouth at his neck before pulling back enough to say, "I love the sounds you make, baby boy. So pretty. Makes me *burn*."

Stiles leans in for more, but Derek stops him with a hand on his chest. "But first we need to talk."

Stiles makes a dissatisfied 'unh' but Derek heroically manages not to give in, crosses his arms and rises from knees to standing in a single move. Stiles crosses his own arms, settles back on his heels

and stares up at him.

“You.” Derek reaches down with a single finger, pushes it slightly, right into the saucy tip of Stiles’ nose. “*You*. Did a foolish and *dangerous* thing today.”

Stiles looks startled that Derek would bring it up, and then looks down and sideways, broadcasting his discomfort and trying to hide his apprehension. Derek pulls the coffee table back a bit and then sits on it, facing Stiles. He lets his finger drift down until it can tuck inside the ‘collar’. “You must listen to me, because you’re pack. But double so if you’re going to wear this.” Stiles’ Adam’s apple bounces Derek’s finger as the boy swallows nervously, eyes flitting up to his face and back down with uncomfortable rapidity.

“You know what you did, right Stiles?” Derek sharpens his voice with Alpha authority, lets a little Dom slide through, because this is important, and he needs to get it out of the way before they progress any further.

Goosebumps break out suddenly along Stiles arms and chest, and Derek feels the sharp twist of fear along the bond.

“Hey, hey,” Derek catches and lifts Stiles’ chin, waits until the boy’s reluctant eyes meet his own. “I’m *not them*. This is about your safety. Nothing else. I won’t do anything you don’t agree to.”

Shifty eyes. Hands that pinch and dig into forearms. White teeth misshaping a pink lip.

Derek waits it out, strokes his thumb gently across one sharp cheekbone, a metronome of comfort. He hums a little, deep in his chest, when he feels Stiles begin to relax, when limpid eyes skate slowly from his chin to his own gaze in a grueling, uphill climb.

“You with me?” he asks. He’s settling into Domspace, solid and weighty, firmly planted and patient: a colossus. “You understand that you are safe with me?” He waits.

Stiles heart slows its frantic tempo, and he leans his head into the cup of Derek’s palm, after some thought. He quirks a tiny smile, and nods.

An electric frisson races under Derek’s skin, the soft flesh and now-genuine downcast eyes triggering something within him. “Very good.” His voice is deeper, now, more ponderous.

He tilts Stiles’ face upward again and leans down to give him a kiss. Holds his jaw open with one hand, traces the collar with the other. He doesn’t let Stiles kiss back, just holds him still and tongues his teeth, the roof of his mouth, setting his own rhythm, imposing it on the sub.

Stiles softens further under his hands.

Derek sits back again, waits until Stiles can focus once more. “You made two very big fuckups today.” He holds up two fingers, and Stiles looks from them back to his face, a line of worry drawing his eyebrows down.

“First thing: uncontrolled shifting. I understand that you were upset-” which is such a massive understatement, because Derek can *imagine* what was on that video: it would be so horrific that retreating to the comfort of your animal brain makes all kinds of sense, “-and afraid. But you *cannot* do that. Werewolves must stay secret, Stiles. My entire family was slaughtered just for

being what we are.” He swallows hard. “*I won’t lose anyone else.* For now, you may only shift when I say so. Do you understand?”

Stiles toys with a few hairs on his knees and then shrugs a little helplessly. He looks up at Derek, eyes wide, and his *How can I possibly guarantee that?* is clearly expressed. “I’m going to help you with that, okay?” he says. It’s enough to make Stiles nod.

“The other mistake you made,” Derek folds down his second finger, “was running out of your house into the middle of town.” Stiles head droops on the slender stem of his neck, giving Derek a good view of the knotted shirt against his cervical vertebrae, the draping ends of it moving gently as he sighs. His shoulders curve in, and the smell of submission and dejection grows stronger.

Derek runs massaging fingertips over the velvet fuzz of Stiles’ head, tugging him forward a little until his forehead rests on Derek’s knee. “I don’t know how your father dealt with disobedience,” he says slowly. “Normally I would just have you over my knee for a spanking, if it was something that actually put you in danger, or if it was something I’d expressly forbidden. For less dramatic transgressions, you’d just stand in the corner.”

Stiles whines, and Derek spreads his fingers wide around the round bone of Stiles’ skull, trying to envelop the sub, to be both comfort blanket and shield. “In light of the past few weeks,” he continues, stepping carefully through a minefield. “I don’t think corporal punishment will do anything but damage.” He hesitates before saying, “You have been hurt too much already.”

Stiles lifts his head, and Derek traces his features with a blunt fingertip. His skull is so much rounder and thicker in this human form, but still so frangible, and Derek would *never* bring up punishment at this point in a relationship, or ever, with someone so traumatized, if it weren’t so vitally important to keep this beautiful creature safe. He is *precious*, and he must be *protected*.

Derek pulls him in and bends down to scent him, rubs the corner of his mouth along Stiles’ sharp jaw and hollowed cheek, noses the delicate column of his neck, rolls his forehead along each bony shoulder. When he’s done, Stiles is relaxed, both of them unwound in sheer physical reaction to their combined scents, stirred up through Derek’s actions - loam and bergamot and *surety*. Derek kisses Stiles again, because he’s simply irresistible, that parted, pouty mouth is mesmerizing, and the taste within so rewarding. Positive reinforcement has Derek coming back for more: another, and another, licking his way inside to tease Stiles’ tongue with his own, loving the catch of his bristles against Stiles’ chin and cheek.

Stiles is full of sounds, now. A continual jumble of whines and moans all superimposed over a subtle hint of his fox form’s purr, and Derek wants to *devour* him, pull him in until there’s no boundary between their bodies or their minds.

The bond hums contented agreement. Urges both of them onward.

But Derek pulls back again, not content to chase bliss until his point is made. Stiles breathes in his face and even his breath smells of the combination of them. Derek swallows a groan and presses onward. “What discipline do you think your actions earlier should merit, Stiles?”

Derek doesn’t know what he expects (probably evasion, that seems like a probable Stiles strategy) but what he gets is a glance at the transformation of Stiles’ expression from lust-blown to considering to impish. The boy turns around and stretches himself across the seat of the sofa, reaching to grip the back of it with his hands. He looks over his shoulder and wiggles his bottom enticingly.

Derek growls, long and loud. Not a sound of human lust and desire. It's a purely lupine expression of possession and dominance, the need to mark and defend his territory. "Very good," he says at last, breathless with pleasure, mouth feeling as crowded with teeth as his pants feel with an erection that is growing so hard he could possibly hammer nails with it. "Veeeery good, Stiles." He has to stop, so he doesn't choke on his own saliva, welling up in excitement at the bent body, the shining eyes and beautiful, alluring shape of the ass lifted and displayed for him. There's a fat mole near its meridian, and Derek already knows where he's going to land the first swat.

"I'm proud of you for picking. Proud that you're honest about what you can handle, about what works for you." Derek watches as Stiles shivers in response to the praise before he slides off the coffee table and kneewalks over to Stiles, running a hand from his thigh up along his flank, stopping at his shoulder and squeezing lightly. "You look so pretty like this, baby," Derek brushes his fingers against Stiles' lips before resting both hands atop his ass, shamelessly caressing and groping, feeling the smooth skin that will soon be pinkened by his hand.



Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I know this was short, but otherwise the next one would be a monster. And we don't want that, because then Mojo freaks out and procrastinates - *ahem*. I only looked this one over once, because (insert reasonable excuse here), so let me know if something seems really disjointed or there are glaring typos.

Also, with this chapter, Do Not Go Gentle just broke the 100k word mark. Y'all are troopers!

The Spiritual Side of Spanking

Chapter Notes

Mmmm, spanking. I had no idea it was such an epiphanous (and concurrently arousing) experience. This one was so fun to write.... Y'all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sofa is a pale blue velvet, which shouldn't suit Derek at all, and yet manages to blend seamlessly with the whole accidental industrial chic of the cavernous loft. Stiles rubs his face across the soft pile, shuts his eyes and holds his breath. His heart is banging so hard it is jouncing his ribcage, *boomboomboom*, fast and sitting up high in his chest, ready to choke him if he hesitates, if he stops to think. Air is coming in, but freezes before it gets to his lungs, and Stiles already feels floaty from lack of oxygen.

He wants this. Fucking hell, *he demands this*. Mostly he is excited, turned on beyond all reasonable expectation, eager for Derek to touch him some more, eager for kisses, for stroking and nibbling and all the good things. But also there is a burning, strangling *compulsion* to be taken in hand. Stiles' life has been utterly out of his control for so long he has forgotten what it is like to be anything but untethered and afraid. He imagines Derek's broad hands on him, conducting his body and his thoughts with the immutable confidence and security that Derek always radiates.

He *hungers* for that: craves sharply delineated boundaries, because Stiles often forgets where they are. He has to know he is someone's absolute focus, because he so often feels sidelined: small and unimportant, forgotten, neglected – invisible – if he doesn't fight. Even before the kidnapping he felt this way, finding ways to act out just to net the kind of attention he required. With his father, as loving as he is, Stiles still felt that he had to manipulate, to sneak, in order to attain any episodes of discipline, because asking for it somehow made him look weak... not because John ever said so in as many words, but because his is so damningly *proud* when Stiles acts like he doesn't need any interference. His life has been a battle for respect, for simple recognition of his dignity as a sub. The prospect of relinquishing that fight for a little while is stunningly seductive.

He'd been scared out of his tiny little fox-mind earlier, in spite of the brief respite at Lydia's where nothing more was required of him than he be a half-wild animal. But the adrenaline is only in abeyance, not gone altogether, and Stiles must find another outlet.

And he wants *Derek* to do this. No one else would be acceptable. (The very idea of his dad's hands on him right now is anathema – unthinkable and creepy. It would scrape him raw and leave him hollow, he just knows it.)

It is not as if he hasn't been disciplined recently. His whole captivity was an endless barrage of servitude, humiliation, discipline and pain. But... (*Don't think of elephants, don't think of elephants.*)

This is a chance to take back what is his. To overwrite that awful experience. The discrepancy between his desires, his *needs*, and his fear is a chasm, leaving him jittery and agitated. God, he is

so desperate to get out of his own head. Stiles is no idiot. He knows the only way to get over his bad experiences is to have new ones, and academically, he knows that this first leap will be the most terrifying.

But right now his cock is swollen between his legs, throbbing gently with each juddering beat of his heart. His lips are wetted and sensitive, the skin of his face chafed into a tingling awareness.

His eyelids feel heavy, his body languorous. He is *receptive*, sticky and syrupy-cloying-sweet with it. His new were-heightened senses tell him that Derek is similarly wired and waiting: the provocative scent of anticipation is much stronger than the gentle balm of his concern. His heart's rapid tattoo is derived from lust and excitement.

Stiles has watched porn, of course. (*Oh, fuck, right, his dad and Dom both saw it, too, fuck! Okay, Stiles, shhh, now is not the time to dwell on that fiasco...*). He doesn't believe his body is anywhere near as appealing as the ones in the videos, but he does his best, lengthening his spine, presenting his ass in a dip and swoop of skin and slender frame. The velvet edge of the cushion presses into his hips, his legs are parted, he's *zealous*, he's a canvas for Derek's hands... which are touching him now, oh, yes! it's happening. (*Don't think of elephants.*)

For a while, Derek just touches him everywhere, warming his skin with friction, fingers seeking out smooth stretches of muscle and the irregularities of small surface imperfections. The sofa dents as Derek's weight lands on one arm, propped against the back, leaning closely over Stiles; rumbling words of pleasure and adoration are muttered into his neck, the wing of his shoulder, the small of his back.

When both of them are suitably drifting, in a world that consists of no more than themselves and the other's bone and sinew and breath, when they are nothing more than stimulus and response, Derek finally lifts away and puts his palm across Stiles' ass with deliberation.

“You’re so brave,” Derek whispers. “And I’m so proud of you. Stiles. So beautiful and so fucking strong.” His voice cracks, and Stiles stretches sinuously, basking in the rain of praise, the confidence that he’ll do well, the pleasure he’s giving his Dom by giving himself over, by trusting....

Trust is such a fleeting thing. So difficult to build up, so very easy to destroy. Stiles doesn’t perceive himself as being particularly *wired* for trust. Which makes him an awful sub, really. Too much has been taken away from him, too many betrayals. It started with the death of his mom and continued straight through puberty with a father who (while possessed of an abiding love and loyalty) had no idea how to deal with his hyperactive, disappointing wuss of a son. Stiles is woven from the insidiously spreading tendrils of shame and fear and resentment nurtured across the ensuing years of taunts, derision and bullying by his peers.

And yet.

He trusts his Dad to have his best interest at heart. He trusts Scott to love and stand by him (whenever he’s not distracted).

And strangely, after only a couple of weeks, a duration of unbearable silence and fear and pain – he trusts Derek to take him apart. And then to reassemble him into something stronger, more certain and secure. Someone who is comfortable in his own skin, with his secret thoughts, with his socially damnable submissive compulsions.

There is a terrifying kind of rush in making himself this vulnerable, and Stiles finds himself panting; short, ineffective, shallow breaths. He feels like he is about to launch himself off a cliff, with only paper wings and a whispered promise to support him. Derek's hand feels hard and hot on his ass, a weighted harbinger of what's to come.

Stiles doesn't like pain.

He never has. (He has always considered that subs who relish pain must have some important wires crossed, although society is quick to point out that the one with wiring issues is himself.) He has never sought it out: pain is a physiological response to negative stimuli. (He has done his research, alright? It is a signal from the body that something is wrong and that behavioral or situational readjustment is imminently prudent.)

But then there is that slimy, crawling, paining part of him that pleads for a reset. It is not that he feels guilty about shifting and running away. Well, not *too* much. It is that he was afraid. And with however many smacks of Derek's hand (and he can endure, he has endured so much: *this will be trivial in comparison, Stiles, pull on your fucking Big Boy Panties*), he'll be able to start over. To study new rules, a whole new fucking world, and rationally make decisions about it, not be overtaken by emotion. Particularly fear.

Derek's teeth tug on the bit of collar, his stubble harsh against the back of Stiles' neck. The heat and pressure of his bare chest, bulky with muscle, solid and grounding, lays along Stiles spine. "Are you with me?" he asks.

Stiles keens, breathless with expectation. Nods his head vigorously. Keeps his face buried in the soft blue velvet. His skin is thin, super-sensitive. His penis pulses, an urgent reminder, keeping him in his body, recalling his excitement. *Now, now, now.*

Something cool and round is tucked into one fist. "Drop this if you need me to stop," Derek breathes into his spine. "Any time." His fingers stay low on Stiles' hips, his chest and shoulders are heavy on Stiles' upper back. Derek trusts him, too, Stiles realizes dimly. It is fully reciprocal, Derek's full weight on Stiles while his hands are busy elsewhere. Stiles isn't the only one letting go. Not the only one jumping off that cliff.

He breathes in, forcing air past the frantic obstacle of his heart. He relaxes.

"Six for shifting," Derek says. "And six for running away."

It's laughable, as punishments go. But both he and Derek are hyper-aware of what they are trying to overcome with this. What they are trying to build. Stiles clenches his fist around the ball, digs his other into the cushions, and nods his head. Derek kisses him again, lips only a suggestion of warmth and humidity through the t-shirt collar. "This is not about hurting you," he promises. And then he draws back in a rush of cool air.

The wait is interminable. Stiles can imagine it, Derek assessing his target, powerful hand positioned for the first blow. Fingers wrap around Stiles' left hip, keeping him steady, and Stiles feels the tension running thrumming in that touch: it is a mooring, a safeguard. Stiles gasps in air and squeezes his eyes shut.

Smack!

It stings at first, sharp and offensive, shakes through skin and fat and muscle, vibrates into his pelvis, his spine and his ribs. The sound of flesh beating flesh is clarion, a terrifying call to memories best suppressed, but before Stiles can even go there, the pain is drained away, pulled out as forcefully as it came, sucked into the tightening grasp of Derek's stabilizing hand. From the corner of his eye, Stiles sees the web of darkened veins appear and fade along Derek's muscled forearm. The whiplash between pain and pleasure leaves Stiles wrenched between fear and euphoria. If he had a voice, he'd bellow like a fucking alligator, just out of sheer confusion in both the physical insult and the racing, bizarrely contradictory pleasure.

Yes!, he thinks. Yes, yes!

He cries out, a soft, clear note, resonating with the overwhelming, physical knowledge that his trust was not misplaced.

Smack!

Smack!

Dizzily, Stiles thinks perhaps he should reassess. That perhaps he was built to trust after all. That perhaps he possesses a huge reservoir of trust – vast, indescribable, unfathomable – that has only wanted for a receptacle.

Derek's hand lifts and falls again. His pattern is random, as if he's aiming for something other than symmetry. *Smack!* And then the tidal rush of extirpated pain. Stiles is getting high on endorphins, as if he needs anything more than the cascade of realizations he's had in the past 20 minutes.

I can let go.

With that thought, tears come, because it's such an unexpected relief. So unplanned for. Stiles had never even dreamed that this could be in his future. Until this very moment, he had assumed he would eventually find a Dom that wasn't a complete asshole. Someone that wouldn't beat him too badly when he refused to kowtow. Someone who didn't secretly despise Stiles' dynamic (well, no: realistically, Stiles had known he could never be *that* lucky). He had never conceived of a future where he didn't need to maintain his defenses.

I'm getting snot on this velvet. Fuck. That's so fucking rude, he thinks, but cannot stifle his emotions and the tears that spring from them.

Smack!

Stiles wriggles and moans. His fingers tighten around ball and cushion. He undulates, unthinking (he isn't spectating anymore, doesn't care if he *looks sexy* or not) tips his ass up to his Dom. He knows it is red. It feels hot, glowing. He fancies himself a swirl, spiraling out from the heat of each crisp blow, becoming less and less real until there is nothing, *nothing* beyond his fingertips except for Derek, whose presence has assumed paramount proportions.

Smack!

Here's the dizzying whirl of the sting being sucked away into Derek's werewolf mojo. Stiles buries his face further in the cushions, mouth shamelessly open, sounds, *sounds*, spilling out of him. His cock swings forcefully with each blow, bumping up against the seat of the sofa. *Oh, god, I'm getting that dirty, too,* but that hardly matters. His perineum feels taut. He can feel each molecule

of blood as it surges through his veins, inexorable, elemental, pushing him further out of his head.

Stiles widens his legs further, wiggles until his thighs brush against the rough fabric of Derek's jeans; and Derek groans back at him, deep and uninhibited, wanton and filthy.

"Six," Derek rasps. He leaves his palm across the latest burn, fingers twitching to some internal rhythm. "That's for shifting."

He breathes heavily, *puff, puff*, hot air on Stiles' shoulders that is shocking – scalding, like steam.

Stiles just trembles, and waits. Each pant is vocalized, he hasn't made this much noise in... possibly ever. At least, not without speaking. He rolls his head on his neck, eyes still closed. A gust of air is released from the cushion, smells of Derek, creeps into each nostril, into the back of his throat, claiming, reassuring, vivifying.

Derek rears back again, switches hands. *Smack!*

Stiles is like a dam, a tsunami of emotion building up behind a wall. Even the Hoover couldn't stand up to this. He spins, thin and frail yet synchronously powerful, as strong as spider silk. He is bursting open at the seams.

Smack!

Stiles cries out, bliss and anguish. His toes curl, his feet become claws, clutching at nothing. There is only Derek, holding him down, rewriting his world. *Smack!* It shudders through his glutes to his anus, hits prostate on the way, through vas deferens and urethra to the full length of his cock, pre-semenal fluid blurting from the tip; Stiles wails and quakes.

Derek growls behind him. He's been growling all along, a low, possessive rumble, displaying his power, his strength. Marking the breadth of his territory, and keeping it safe. Under control.

Smack!

Euphoria crests, body prepared for pain in a chemical protocol and then having it vanish – bled into Derek's protective magic – almost before it registers, like a magician's sleight of hand. Stiles melts into velvet even as he floats. *Smack!*

He thinks he's flying, weightless, racing in the breeze. He can dart in and out of zephyrs like a dolphin on waves. He is nothing but butterflies and down, a prelude to an orgasm so intense it might just spawn new universes. *Smack!*

The bright pain has only an instant before it is erased in a rush of endorphins. Derek's hand rests on its final hit, stilled at last, and Stiles can only think *Derek. Derek. Derek.* through the fog of subspace that cocoons him.

"And that's for running into danger and not calling me," Derek gasps, as breathless as Stiles. Then he rolls Stiles over in an instant, manhandles him recumbent along the length of the couch, body sticky with sweat where it was pressed into the short pile of the velvet. Stiles heaves up his eyelids, slowly focuses on Derek's face, all kaleidoscope eyes with vast pupils, and chiaroscuro of bristle and fair skin. "Stiles–"

Stiles can *feel* him, emotions and sensations, entangled in the bond between them. If he's floating, then Derek is floating, too, and incorporeal as they are, it makes sense that they can merge, that they can feel what the other experiences. Derek is as overwhelmed, as filled with awe, as

unbearably aroused as Stiles. He radiates satisfaction, primal energy, an outpouring of comfort and safety and adoration that makes Stiles whine and shiver.

“Ungh,” says Stiles, eloquently, twitching boneless arms. *Come here.*

And Derek falls into him. He gracelessly tears open his jeans, works them down his legs as he climbs onto the sofa, eagerly exposing his skin to Stiles’, aligning their hips, their thighs, the wiry tangle of their pubic hair. Their cocks.

Stiles closes his eyes and hangs on, desperate sounds chuffing out of him like smoke from a cartoon engine. *Derek, Derek, I’m on the edge, Derek-*

Derek nudges even closer, growls like a wildcat, sharp and feral. He juts his hips forward, the scrape and burn of him like fire against Stiles’ most sensitive skin. Stiles wraps himself around him, hanging on to the only solid thing in all the universe, shaking from the effort of holding back the dam, mouth parted against the solid meat of Derek’s shoulder, biting and breathing, *huh, huh, huh* he needs that push, *needs it –*

So Derek ruts against him again, hips taking up a sinuous, sultry rhythm, as if recalled to his body and his duties, focused on bringing Stiles where he needs to go. (Because that is his *job*, that is his part of the agreement, the unspoken rules of his own dynamic.) Derek answers Stiles in the same wordless sounds that Stiles is using: moans that mean *I’ve got you*, gasps that say *You’re safe*, a long groan for, *You’re not alone; we’re drifting together.*

Come spurts between them. Slick. Scalding. *Binding.* Stiles’ neck is a noodle, his body so disincorporated that it is no more than a conduit for such extreme pleasure that he is not even sure whether he is having an orgasm or a spiritual epiphany. His limbs fall slack, head drops suddenly back to the sofa. He is a ragdoll that Derek scoops closer, ruts onto, holds in place with a ravaging bite against Stiles’ collarbone, teeth catching in their improvised collar. He comes soon after, with a bellow of triumph, every muscle rigid and quivering, adding to the hot, slippery mess between their bellies.

Stiles bestirs himself to hum something affectionate. Lifts one nerveless arm and lets it drop across Derek’s broad shoulders, damp with the sweat of their exertions. “Derek,” he whispers. It is the first word that has passed his lips, and it comes easily into the quiet, sacred space they have made: safe and intimate.

Derek buries his head in Stiles’ neck, presses his lips to the black strip wrapped around Stiles’ neck. Stiles can feel his shuddering breath, the sweep of wet eyelashes against his ear, the burning trickle of something they’d both deny was tears. “Oh, Stiles –” His arms close tightly around Stiles, awed, cherishing, protective and most importantly, patient. He demands nothing further, doesn’t comment on Stiles single word, just encourages him, with slow caresses and gentle murmurs, to drift, to bask.

They sleep for a while, a sex-stupor’d catnap. And when they eventually sit back up, Derek winds the ragged bit of cloth around and around again smoothing the rippled edges, making sure it sits flat. When he finally tucks it up, in back, the tails have vanished, and Stiles’ neck is wrapped and concealed from jaw to collarbone. There is no sign of bruise. No sign of scar. Derek has owned it, obscured it and made it vanish.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaarrrrgggh, I'm sorry this is late, I hurt my back again (gosh darnit, have I bitched about being old already? Consider that rant served up yet again, 'cause it's Springtime, and I wanna dig in the dirt. Not faaaiiiirrrr!) At any rate, I spent the weekend sleeping off narcotics and muscle relaxers, so at least I'm well-rested. And thanks for your concern *waves at Auchi*. I'll try to answer last chapter's comments later today: I've fallen behind, oops. As always, don't feel slighted if I don't answer: I always read them, they always make me happy, and I often even shove them under Mr. Mojo's nose because they make me so proud and grateful. (It's especially rewarding to see someone go through multiple chapters and squee – I'm looking at you, starrysummernights). Y'all are the bestest.

Of Pizza and Puppy Piles

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Derek hears the familiar rumble of the Camaro engine in the distance, he's seated on the couch with Stiles curled in his lap, drifting in and out of little catnaps. He looks down at the growing brush of soft hair against his shoulder. Stiles eyelids twitch and open to a clear brown gaze. His eyebrows go up immediately in question, probably sensing the change in Derek's breathing, his heartbeat, and, smart boy that he is, associating it with the sound of the approaching car.

"Betas coming back," Derek confirms laconically, and drops his head to nose just above Stiles' ear, inhaling the scent of sex and drowsy, satisfied sub. There are a couple empty water bottles on the coffee table, some wrappers as well, from when Derek had collected the shaking, gasping form of a wrecked sub from his post orgasmic sprawl and wrapped him up in a soft blanket from his bed, enfolding him in warmth and scent, and caring for him while he emerges from subspace. It pleases him immensely that it had taken Stiles so long to float back to the surface, conspicuously highlighting how comfortable and safe he feels in Derek's den.

Derek himself is suffused in the languid afterglow of a good session, muscles and mindset both sated and at peace. He's less drowsy than Stiles, filled more with serene watchfulness, planted protectively by his mate, eyes sharp on the environment although he expects no challenge. If he were in his wolf form, he'd be sat on his haunches, overseeing his territory with head up and ears cocked for any disturbance.

Stiles has not spoken again, but Derek isn't surprised by that. They'd both been startled by his first vocalized word, earlier, and Derek treasures its mental echo, carefully hoards it in his heart: the rough scratch of Stiles' disused voice, deeper than Derek would have predicted; the overtones of wonder and want; the fact that it was Derek's *name*. Derek thinks selfishly that he might be glad that Stiles seems ready to share this only with him, so far.

There's a huff of silent laughter that brushes against the underside of his chin, and he glances down to see Stiles grinning, no doubt picking up on Derek's emotions. Stiles leans up and butts his cheek against Derek's, pulling back his lips to expose white teeth before biting him inelegantly along the side of his jaw. His eyes gleam, and he blinks them black before they return to their human amber. Derek returns a playful growl, but where normally such a bite would have a direct line to his cock, now it filters into his chest instead, warm and powerful, and he feels the bond between them sing, blazing bright as brass, more compelling and robust than ever before. Stiles begins to purr, the vibration of it detectable even before Derek hears the gentle buzzing that is a manifestation of his mate's quiet joy.

They kiss, then, Derek with half an ear on the car, going silent with a few ticks of the cooling engine, the clatter of their pack stumbling through the downstairs foyer, teasing each other as they come. Stiles tastes of cookies and apple, and his tongue is warm and engaged against Derek's own.

When the three betas reach the rolling door, Stiles stiffens a bit, and Derek strokes his hand over his head and down his back in wordless assurance. He is sometimes startled to remember that Stiles is less familiar with the other three than he, because they've fallen so naturally into a pack dynamic.

The rattle and scrape as the giant door is pulled back has Stiles popping up like a meerkat, and Derek grins internally at the idea of it, even while he puts his hand around the back of Stiles' neck, fingers tucked under the intricately wrapped impromptu collar.

Erica immediately scrunches up her nose and groans, presumably at the smell of sex, but Boyd hip-checks her before she can speak, easily balancing six pizza boxes in his far hand. Isaac quickly scoops them away, though, always protective of his food, and heads for the kitchen bar. Erica uses Boyd's shove as momentum and literally leaps at Stiles and Derek, squealing, once she's flying about two feet over the coffee table, "*Cuddle huddle!!!*" She lands on Derek and Stiles full-force, utterly remorseless, and Derek must move quickly to keep most of her weight from crashing into Stiles, absorbing it instead in the one arm he has free. Erica giggles, already a little giddy (Derek assumes they're feeling the Alpha pair's contentment through their bonds, wittingly or not) and snuggles in between Stiles' knees and Derek's shoulder.

Isaac, who had become alert at Erica's shout, detours immediately from the kitchen, plopping the pizzas instead down on the coffee table. He casts a quick, shy look at Derek for encouragement before sinking down to Derek's left, wiggling under Erica's legs and Derek's arm. Derek doesn't miss the questioning look he sends at Stiles, either, whether it's in permission or apology, but he is warmed by the happy smile that Stiles returns, inclusive and encouraging. (He may not yet know that he is playing the part of Alpha Mate, but he's doing it perfectly by instinct alone, and Derek is filled with pride, for both him and his pack, more mellow and grounded than he's been in a long time.)

Stiles pulls a wry face at the two interlopers, but his subsequent smile is incandescent, and Derek has no worries. They both look over at Boyd, who groans, but flings himself on Isaac's other side anyway, movement belying the annoyed roll of his eyes. "Puppy piles are undignified," he announces gravely, but he still chuckles when Erica kicks her feet up to tuck them behind his shoulders, and he casually throws one arm around Isaac as he scoops a pizza box closer to open it against his knees.

They stuff themselves silly. Derek is amused to see that Stiles, with only one hand free, grabs two pieces, smashes them together into a pizza sandwich, folds the whole thing in two lengthwise, and devours it in about four bites: now here is a teenager experienced in eating in the absolute quickest, most efficient manner possible. (Although it is not something Derek would have predicted in someone who did *not* grow up in a family of wolves.) Isaac and Boyd pick up on it quickly and adopt the same style, whether they're galvanized more by pack instinct to emulate their leaders or adolescent instinct to protect their food before it gets eaten by others. Erica doesn't need that, because she's commandeered one entire pizza and viciously slaps any hand that approaches it to grab a slice, unless it belongs to Derek or Stiles.

When six, grease-stained, empty boxes stare sadly back at them, they lean back again, all five of them draped across each other on the couch, legs and arms entangled, and doze off the food coma. They're all too replete to even stand up and get anything to wash it down, although Isaac does offer. (His offer makes Stiles whine in protest, his feet warmly tucked under Isaac's thigh, and Isaac quickly sinks back into the cushions. Eh, water, who needs it?)

Stiles, still wrapped tightly in his blanket burrito save for the single arm he'd extended for pizza, snuggles under Derek's chin, continually and slowly rubbing his cheek on Derek's shoulder in an unconscious gesture reminiscent of self-soothing babies. Derek holds him close with one arm, loving the smell and the weight and the heat of him, pressed so closely against Derek's body. Derek's other arm stretches across the three betas, so that he's got physical contact with each

member of his pack, and he basks in the feeling of peace and equanimity: it feels so hard-won and well-earned after these last few weeks.

It all ends with an enormous belch from Boyd. Erica laughs and shoves him over the arm of the couch, so that he catches himself on the floor, grumbling.

“We should run,” Isaac suggests. “Maybe? It might be nice?”

Isaac so rarely suggests anything that Derek generally indulges him. And given the changes in the pack, Isaac might need reassurance, although he doesn’t currently smell of it, now that Derek’s taken on a mate and a sub. The boy would never admit to his dynamic, but he’s submissive to the core, and Derek had stepped in as his Dom from the time he’d rescued Isaac from his abusive step-father. Just because Derek now has a lover, a mate, and a semi-official sub (he knows the pack has noticed the t-shirt collar around Stiles’ neck, although they’d been more focused on eating and cuddles than kibitzing) doesn’t mean he won’t still provide the boundaries that Isaac craves, the reassurance and repercussions, the strength, security and discipline. (It had never been sexual between the two of them... or even spoken of specifically... but Derek makes a note to keep an eye on Isaac to ensure that doubt doesn’t begin to creep into his mind.)

He nods decisively. “Good idea, Isaac,” he says, and shoves gently at his and Erica’s napes to motivate them off the sofa and off him and Stiles so that they may stand as well. “Go on, get ready.”

There’s not much for the betas to do, but Stiles is still naked under the blanket, since he’d come into the loft wearing nothing more than his fur. Derek himself had only bothered to put back on his jeans, so he sweeps up Stiles, who squeaks when he’s lifted, and carries him up the stairs to his bedroom. While Stiles flails in the blanket (actually trapping himself more securely) Derek tosses him gently onto the bed and tries to answer the curiosity written in his expressive face.

“We run as a pack, in full wolf shift,” he explains, dropping his jeans to pull on soft sweats instead. “It’s always fun, good for pack bonding. I drive us to the Preserve, plenty of space to run in the woods there.” As he pulls on a dark henley, he looks at Stiles, who is sitting up in his nest of blankets. His lean chest gleams softly in the dim room, wide eyes temporarily dark pools, nearly as black as the collar around his neck. Derek has to step over and kiss him again, leaning on the bed with one hand, other firmly sunk in the hair on the back of Stiles’ head.

Stiles yields beautifully, still so soft and pliant from earlier, and the shiver and small sounds he makes are nearly enough to make Derek ignore the rest of the pack and just stay here, keeping Stiles in his bed, pleased and willing, slowly introducing him to all the sensual pleasures he’s clearly never known, doing everything in his power to wipe clear the degradations of their captivity.

But the excited hum in his chest recalls him to his duties as Alpha. The pack is downstairs, waiting, and clearly relieved to be *pack* again, to have everyone together and safe. The fact that Stiles is collared, even in such a temporary way, and reeking of sex and Derek seems to make the betas much more relaxed, as they instinctively understand his place in the pack now. Alpha Mate. He’s not replacing anyone. A new space has been made for him, and it’s not one that any of the pack had been vying for, and there’s simply no competition there.

Of course, Derek thinks as he pulls away, teeth tugging Stiles’ bottom lip along for the ride until it pops free, nothing is really that simple. There will be ups and downs and squabbles and hurt feelings, of course there will. For a brief moment, he fervently wishes that something in his life

could be that easy. Since the death of his family, everything has been such a battle, each step taken a slog through maliciously tenacious tar, and just. It would be nice for something to come easily.

But then he opens his eyes, and there is Stiles, inches in front of him, tousled and purring and simply, *scandalously* beautiful, and Derek wants to punch himself. *This* has been easy. Stiles has burrowed into Derek's heart so softly and insidiously that it had been a surprise to find him ensconced there. Stiles, with his unique personality, his curiosity and his vast reserves of strength and courage. It was effortless, and Derek hadn't been looking for such a thing, but he'll hold on to it now, clutch it with all the wiles and resources he can bring to bear, because Stiles is too precious to ever let go.

Stiles scrunches his face up, then - *Dude, why are you just hovering there staring at me?* - and Derek laughs a little before he realizes he's going to. He molds his hand to the side of Stiles' face and then threads fingers through his stubbly hair in a long, fond stroke. "You're beautiful," he says, and then tweaks his saucy nose before Stiles has a chance to get embarrassed. He grabs for socks and puts them on, balancing easily on one leg and then the other.

"The pack and I wait to shift until we're there," he says. "Even in this area they'd notice a bunch of wolves. But if you'd like to shift here, then you won't have to bother with dressing."

Stiles response is to melt into his fox form, and wow, Derek is very impressed with how quickly and easily he figured out how to shift. Even after a year, the betas are still very deliberate and focused about it. Stiles' shift is, at its core, very different from what Derek does, or even his bitten betas, and Derek wonders if maybe it isn't somehow closer to magic than the rest of them. Derek and the betas shift via *change*. Muscle moves, bones shrink or grow, skin morphs from naked to furred, and back again. Derek can do it very quickly, between one step and the next, but it's still a process. Stiles seems to simply flicker from one form to the other, faster than a thought, or a blink. There are no sounds to accompany it, as there are with the grinding and stretching pops of the wolves' transitions.

Well, now is not the time to ponder such things.

Stiles yips from his spot on the bed, and Derek helps dig him out of the blanket, smirking at Stiles' offended expression as his fur is dragged backward by his extraction. Derek can't help but pull him close, pressing a kiss on his small skull, ears perking up nearly past Derek's eyebrows, they're that big. The collar sags from his neck, draping down as far as his toes, and Derek pulls it away and tucks it in a bedside drawer. "It'll wait here for you," he assures Stiles, who is watching his actions closely. The little fox nods, and Derek puts him on the floor to finish dressing.

Derek slips his feet into loose sneakers that are specifically for this occasion and then gathers Stiles and the betas and ferries them all to the woods. (Erica coos and tries to grab Stiles, who rolls his eyes spectacularly well for an animal whose whites don't show, and tauntingly turns his back on her to curl up across Derek's thigh.)

They pull onto a tiny graveled spur cuddled close in trees and underbrush some fifteen minutes later. Boyd slides out and Erica and Isaac are close on his heels. They smell eager: bright and spicy. The three of them shed their clothes unselfconsciously, tossing them in the trunk, which

Derek had opened from the driver's seat. He nudges Stiles over the gear console into the passenger side. "You can go, too. I need to call your father before I shift."

Stiles looks torn for a moment, his entire body sways with his indecision: stay with Derek where he's safe? Or go outside to play in the forest with his new packmates? Isaac sticks his nose through the door, already wearing the shaggy coat of his wolf. He gives an inquisitive whine, and Boyd's much larger body presses around him, head cocked at their Alpha. Stiles backs up a few steps, suddenly confronted with two wolf heads the size of his body, and Derek strokes him with a comforting hand as he answers Boyd's implied question. "Don't go too far, just while I make this call, and then we will all stretch our legs."

Isaac's body shakes with excitement, and he whines, laying his muzzle on the seat, making his head slightly lower than Stiles. He stares up at the white-furred fox through pleading eyes, and his message is clear, "Let's go play." Boyd's large jaw drops and his tongue lolls: *Nothing vicious going on here: no worries.* (Of course, there are hunters on the prowl, but keeping an eye out for them is Derek's job, and he's not likely to forget it.)

Derek scoops Stiles up and exits the car, walking around the front to crouch before the betas. He looks at Stiles. "I'll be right here. Feel free to explore or not, as you wish." And then he flaps his hand at the three wolves milling eagerly around them. "Go on. Just give me a few minutes." Erica is off like a shot, surprisingly quiet as she darts through the tangle of underbrush that bounds the road. Boyd barks and falls in behind her: the chase is on. Isaac waits for a moment, watching to see what Stiles will do.

What Stiles will do is sit on his ass, evidently, so Isaac turns around and vanishes into the dark as well. Derek fishes his phone out of his pocket and dials John, one hand scratching absently between Stiles' ears. (Stiles is occupied with the nocturnal susurrus of the woods before John even answers the phone, and wanders off a few feet, nose twitching and sniffing at the air, ears going this way and that.)

"Derek?"

"Yes," Derek feels his anger from earlier in the day come back.

"How is Stiles? Did he shift back?" John sounds worried and strained, and Derek feels guilty for a moment, making this man stress more just to assuage his own resentment.

"Stiles is fine," he says. "And we've had a talk about when and where shifting will be tolerated."

"Oh, thank god," John breathes, and the remnants of Derek's anger blow away. Right now, John is a father who has been frantic with worry for his son, and it seems unnecessary to punish him further.

There's another voice in the background, murmuring a question, and John answers 'okay'. Derek is fairly certain the other person there is Chris Argent, and wonders briefly about why the man would have stuck around all afternoon, keeping John company during his long wait.

"We're at the Preserve right now," Derek says, impatient to wrap up the conversation. "We'll run as a pack for a couple of hours before we go back. Stiles will be safe with us: I'll keep a close eye out."

John makes an uncertain kind of sound, as though he's not sure *what* to think about Stiles running with a bunch of wolves, much less what to say.

Derek continues, getting to the meat of his call. "He needs to stay with us for a while. He needs his pack," (and also his Alpha and his Dom, Derek doesn't add.) "I'll bring him back to you on Sunday before dinner." It feels oddly like arranging custody of a child between a couple of divorcés.

John doesn't say anything at first, just inhales sharply. Derek can hear him relay the comment to Chris, who answers quite clearly, "John, you have to let him go. You're not what he needs right now."

The sharp, liquid gurgle of a forced swallow comes through their connection: John trying to subsume his knee-jerk protests. Derek simply waits. Stiles, scrabbling after an insect under a tufty needled shrub, has one ear cocked back, and Derek doesn't doubt that he's hearing everything. Chris speaks again, voice low and strangely gentle, a quality Derek has never heard from him before. "He needs his Dom, John. I know you know that, and I know you're trying to deny it, but that's only hurting him –"

The voice is suddenly muffled, as if John turned away. "Alright," he says. "We're going to work it out. And. I'll see you both for dinner on Sunday."

Derek does not sigh in relief, nope. But he says goodbye in a lighter voice, finding it easier to be kind when he doesn't feel threatened that Stiles is going to be pulled away at any moment. Stiles bounds over to him as soon as he disconnects, and the gleam of his eyes and arched curve of his tail speak of his own relief. Derek grins. "Come on, let's run."

Stiles thinks that being a fox this time is different from any other. Most noticeably, he's not swamped in overwhelming fear and pain. His senses aren't overclocked with adrenaline and his body feels good when he moves, in spite of (or because of) the very faint sting from his freshly spanked haunches. A faint breeze ripples his fur, penetrating here and there to his skin, and it's a sensation he's never felt before. His... nose feels *huge*. It's weird. Just, there are so many different smells, somehow, like he's got fifteen noses instead of one, each scent getting analyzed and catalogued independently, and none of this flood of incoming information is overloading his brain (a rarity for a kid with ADHD). Here is the rich loam of the forest floor, the sharp bite of pinesap, cars and exhaust from the highway, out of sight, but close enough to hear.

After a bit of rough and tumble, playful growls and yips, a group howl that Stiles enjoys so much he initiates another, and another, and then a third, they fall in for the run. Well. More of a trot. Actually, there's very little forward momentum altogether, although Stiles does take off like a shot right at first, dodging between Derek's giant paws and flinging himself off of fallen trunks and random stones, delighting in the way he can leap and stop, sprint and spin. But then he'll get distracted, and follow a scent or try to wrestle down a bug or dried leaf. An owl swoops down low, and Stiles chitters in shock, screeching his way over to where Derek stands, sentinel and safe.

Derek obligingly growls at the owl, who aristocratically ignores all their antics and appears to give up on this part of the woods as a bad job for the night. Stiles barks good riddance, clearly intoxicated on the evening and camaraderie.

Erica, Isaac and Boyd don't seem to be upset that Stiles is inhibiting their run. They seem delighted as he loosens up, dropping in front of him, hindquarters shaking in playful invitation before leaping up and racing away. Stiles chases after, never too far from Derek, though.

Erica initiates tug of war over bendy branch, and Stiles holds the thing between his sharp teeth, nose pulled back into warning folds, snarling. Erica acts for a while as though their strength is equal, and then, with a teasing huff, stands up fully, lifting her head, and Stiles is left dangling in midair, undignified indeed, yet also unwilling to release his growling grip on the stick. Erica shakes him off eventually, and he dashes in circles, challenging her to try again. His body makes noises for him: mischievous, excited (*piercing*) shrieks. He grabs the stick and offers it to Isaac, pulling it away when Isaac moves to take the other end, cheeping his foxy, waggish provocation.

He knows he is acting ridiculously. But it is such a relief to let go, to be silly and impish, to drop the trappings of humanity and let the animal in himself have rein, unabashed. It is obvious that the others feel the same way, and Stiles never has the sense that he's being judged, or that he should restrain his behavior. And that, in itself, is novel indeed.

Pack runs are great!

He wears himself out eventually. Derek has recognized that no one's going to run very far tonight and, after joining in the scuffles for long enough (his growls, even frolicsome, bringing a pleasant shiver to Stiles' small frame), he pulls back to watch. Now Derek is half-lying down, and Stiles expends the last of his energy to leap at him, clamboring up his side and settling himself in the dip between shoulder blades and neck. He looks smugly at the betas, secure in his status as king on the werewolf mountain. Derek woofs at him, and allows him to enjoy his triumph for some five minutes before standing up, laughing a lupine laugh as Stiles slides indignantly down his back to tumble to the ground.

They wander back to the car, and climb inside, human once more (except for Stiles, who feels a little superior about that as well, that he doesn't have to shift, doesn't have to dress and undress. Sure, he may be smaller than they when he has four legs, but he can get away with *murder*, can't he?) Back at the loft, a last snack is had, teeth are brushed, some take showers, and somehow, Derek's bed is slowly occupied by four wolves and a fennec fox, curled around each other, mumbling and groaning in their canid fashion as they walk themselves in a circle before settling down, bed dipping and warping as they do.

Stiles wiggles himself into what may become his favorite spot, nestled in the thick fur under Derek's neck, against his sturdy wolf chest. Derek's hot breath gusts over him, a continual wash of warmth, and he lifts his head to swipe his tongue down Stiles' skull, from his nose to his shoulders. Stiles grousing at that, pushes half-heartedly at Derek's nose with a lazy paw.

The horrendous events of the afternoon seem very far away right now: something that happened to a storybook Stiles, perhaps. Instead, Stiles breathes in his pack, their happiness, their commitment to one another, their gentle inclusion of him in their midst.

It is a good night to be a fox.

End Part 2

Chapter End Notes

Welp. I pretty much wrote this entire thing yesterday. I mean, I knew I might want to insert a chapter here that gave us all some much-needed fluff and shenanigans aimed toward pack bonding and healing, but I spent the last ten days just thinking about it and then immediately seeking something else to do instead. I am a master procrastinator. So I hope this is alright, and not too twee and/or filled with errors.

It's ironic that I'd spontaneously decide to whip out another 4k words right after having a lovely conversation with TealTigress about outlines and how sometimes actually following them is a good thing. (Ahahahaha.) But the gist of it is, and I know that I frequently make this kind of judgement on other people's work, go full-steam ahead on your story, but don't lose momentum and wander *tra la la*. You know, one of those stories where the first part is edge-of-your seat and terror-inducing and then it shifts gears and coasts for, um, a little too long.

I probably should have made this a series and ended the first part when they left the cave in the woods and headed back to Beacon Hills. Ah, well, what can you do? There are things I selfishly wanted to include, like bullying in school, and mutism in school while Derek plays protective service dog, and that couldn't realistically come *too* quickly. (That's already written, by the way.)

Aannyhoo, I'm slowly slogging my way through the final chapters, probably three or four, given my propensity to wander: but I've already written the inciting incident for the climax and just need to squeeze out a showdown (2 chapters, maybe?) and then a wrap-up, basically. And perhaps a porny epilogue, because, duh. So wish me luck and the ability to focus, my darlings. And forgive me if I neglect your thoughtful and encouraging comments while I try to drive forward.

PART THREE In Which There is Therapy and the Introduction of What Could Potentially be a FABULOUS Idea

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



Part 3: Collars and Dogs and Schools, Oh My!

Monday morning, John hustles Stiles out of bed and whisks him off to a round of appointments with both an ENT doctor and his old therapist. Stiles is reluctant and irritated, and frankly has no desire to go suffer through people probing at him and asking questions, but at least his dad has the courtesy to stop at a drive-thru for coffee and a couple of sausage biscuits first thing.

Stiles morosely sips at his coffee – it’s too hot and not sweet enough, and they forgot the cream, but it’s too late to fix it now – and tells himself to buck up and face the day like a man. He had the whole weekend with Derek and the pack, not coming home until dinner last night, an awkward affair with Dad and Derek both being stiltedly polite over a rather awful frozen spinach lasagne (*At least Dad tried, right?* Stiles feels a bittersweet pang when he recognizes that his father is trying to make him feel better by sticking to the healthy diet Stiles insists on. It’s a subtle gesture, but appreciated nonetheless.)

The ribbon of tee shirt that Stiles had worn for the weekend - his and Derek's makeshift collar - has been in his pocket since the night before, hidden from his father's astute gaze. He brings his fingers up to his neck, now, bare and faintly rough with the patchy stubble he manages to produce some five days slower than anyone else.

He sighs.

The ENT is familiar, Stiles having had something like three (or four, or twenty) rounds of ear tubes in his early childhood. Dr. Sonenschein (Stiles had always called him Dr. Sunshine, because, hey, his hearing wasn't the best, what with all the fluid in his ears) smiles at him, pokes and prods, does

the whole *ahhh* thing. He's an old, old man, with paper-thin skin and a hesitant walk, but he's very cheerful, clearly loves his job, will probably die of old age while flashing a light down some kid's throat. (God, won't that be scarring for whatever sad schmuck is on the exam table *that day*?)

"I understand you've had a tough few weeks, young man," he says briskly, at the start of the examination. Stiles stares at him suspiciously, and is completely startled to note a fine collar gleaming from the wrinkles around the old man's neck. Huh. He supposes he hasn't seen the good doctor since he presented, and it hadn't ever occurred to him to be aware of people's dynamic before that pivotal moment in his own life. He can't help but smile, a little, at the first other male sub he's aware of having met. He puts his hand to his naked throat, but frowns, when he has no answering collar to show the man. The doctor smiles back anyway, winks good-naturedly, seems aware that they share this trait. (Well, it's doubtless recorded right there on his chart. No need for sub-to-sub telepathy.)

Dr. Sonenschein has seen a lot, over the years, and his calm demeanor is definitely soothing. He notes Stiles' vocalization of *ahhh*, and nods. He pushes back on his little rolling stool and looks between Stiles and John. "I don't see any medical or physical reason here that Stiles can't talk," he says bluntly. "The X-rays show that the swelling has gone down, the hyoid and nasal fractures are healed, visible as these bright white lines of newly grown bone here." Stiles and his dad both lean closer to the lighted frame to see for themselves. Yes, it's just as the doctor says, a thin white line across the bones of his neck, and another across his nose.

Dr. Sonenschein props himself on the corner of his desk when the Stilinskis sit back down and pulls his stethoscope from his pocket, toying with the silver disk at the end before wadding it back up and putting it on the desk behind him. He opens a jar of mints and offers it to Stiles, who accepts, and John, who declines. "It's clear to see that there's been trauma. Not just because of the evidence of contusions, but also because the most common cause of a hyoid fracture is strangulation, which would indicate –" He pauses here, but Stiles isn't about to add any commentary. "Well. The swelling that remains is inadequate to affect speech. And Stiles, it seems like you're able to vocalize when it's not about using words..."

Stiles just shrugs, unwilling to commit. His heart pounds, though, and he goes cold with a surge of adrenaline, somehow afraid that this kind old man is going to *make* him speak, and then the whole ugly story will be dragged out of him, and. Just. No.

Dr. Sonenschein smiles a little sadly at Stiles, and rubs his hands together briskly before turning back to John. "This means that not speaking is, for right now, probably a *choice*. You need to take this young man to a psychologist, Sheriff. There's nothing I can do here."

John wrings his hands absently, eyes sharp on the old man. Stiles can smell sweat and nervousness building up around him, weaving through the familiar scent of *Dad*. "Of course. Yes. We've got an appointment with a therapist in about," he checks his watch, "half an hour, actually. Is there. Is there anything I should tell her?"

"You may certainly tell her that she is free to contact me with any questions – as long as you fill out the proper release forms – and that I don't see any immediate physical explanation for why he isn't talking." His eyes are penetrating, for all his age, and they linger on Stiles' throat. "I suspect that whatever happened emotionally while Stiles was held captive will be more causal than any physical remnant." He pauses and pulls out a card from a drawer. "Here's a speech therapist, who might be brought in to help, if your therapist thinks that would be a good idea."

They stand up to leave, John shaking hands before opening the door for Stiles. Before he steps out, Stiles stares again at the old man's collar. Dr. Sonenschein walks up to him and puts one hand on Stiles' shoulder. "I have never found being a sub something to be ashamed of," he says quietly. "And neither should you, my boy. It doesn't make you weak. It shouldn't limit what you want to do with your life."

Stiles hand has migrated up to his neck again, and he nods stiffly before turning away.

John flashes him a concerned look as they head for the car. "You all right, Stiles?" he asks, probing about the doctor's final comment in a roundabout way. Because he'd heard it. Of course he'd heard it.

Stiles just shrugs and nods, jamming his hands into his pockets and staring at the crumbling asphalt of the parking lot. It's not something he wants to talk about. *Talk. Heh.*

Mrs. Casteel looks pretty much the same now as she did six years ago, after his Mom had died. She is 'a lady of a certain age' with painted black eyebrows and bright dyed-red hair. She calls them back with a smile and offers Stiles a greeting and a hug at the door of her office. Stiles tenses up, and she quickly and smoothly aborts the motion, bless her, waving them in and giving Stiles plenty of space as he passes through the door. He feels prickly and nervous and sheet-thin and fragile and furious all at once. There's no room for another person inside this bubble of fraught emotions. The only touch he'd welcome right now is Derek's. And maybe the pups.

The office is brightly lit through a large picture window that looks out over a pretty courtyard. The accoutrements of her specialty are littered around: a sandbox, puppets and dolls, art supplies and many, many pictures tacked up on the walls. It feels strange to think he's still technically under the purview of pediatric doctors and specialists. So much has happened to him lately that he feels far, far removed from childhood.

Mrs. Casteel offers them tea or water, which they both decline, before she seats herself on an armchair across from the sofa currently hosting the Stilinskis and clasps her hands before her very bountiful bosom. "Now. Stiles. From what I understand from your father, you've had a very hard time, these past few weeks." Stiles shrugs again (it's the only movement he can make today, it seems) and makes a little *maybe* moue. He gestures at his dad.

"Hello, John," says Mrs. Casteel. "It is nice to see you again as well. We'll start this session with both of you, since I need to know what we're working with. After that, at Stiles' discretion, I will expect that you'll simply wait out in the waiting room."

John nods his acknowledgement, and then launches, business-like, into a quick recap of Stiles' kidnapping and subsequent abuse. (*At least, as much as he's aware of*, thinks Stiles, and is fiercely *glad* that John doesn't know everything, because that secret is only safe with Derek. It's too raw, too painful and heavy and *sickening* to share with anyone else.)

Stiles isn't thrilled at the prospect of therapy. There's so much he can't talk about (*Yeah, werewolves, amirite? You know how it goes, wink, nudge. And I'm a werefennecfox, myself. That's right. Magic.*) and so much he won't talk about (the last day of captivity, for example. Or

the nearly telepathic connection he's formed with Derek.) He likes Mrs. Casteel, always has. He just isn't inclined to help her dissect his life right now.

She and John talk with minimal participation on Stiles' part. He can't be so brazen as to pull out his phone (neither one of them would allow that), but he does slouch and stare at the floor and start scratching deep red lines into his arms until Mrs. Casteel presses a fidget toy into his hands with an utterly unsuccessful attempt at a wink.

"Alright," she says at last, when John's run down. She picks up one of her little yellow pads and hands it over to Stiles, along with a flashy pink pen. "If you're not in the mood to speak right now, Stiles, would you perhaps like to add anything using the written word?"

Stiles frowns at her and very deliberately sets the pad and pen down on the couch beside him. She chuckles. "Well, we'll have to work on that, I see." She settles back in her chair and looks thoughtful. "Have you ever heard of selective mutism, Stiles?"

Stiles frowns, and then waggles his hand back and forth in a *so-so* gesture.

Mrs. Casteel hums in acknowledgement. "It's a voluntary cessation of speech. Usually it affects much younger children who are on the cusp of entering school and reflects a social anxiety disorder. Given your situation, I think we're safe in naming Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as the precursor. This means that it is probable that you are using mutism as a coping mechanism. And *that's fine*." She pauses significantly and waits until he meets her eyes. "It's okay. Right now, I encourage you to use whatever seems effective while you sort yourself out in the aftermath. I am not judging you and neither is anyone else, okay? As we progress in therapy, we'll come up with other tools to support you and help you to cope." She leans forward, and he drops his eyes to her shoes, sensible black pumps with very unsensible bright red soles. "You can take all the time you need, and I know that you will talk when you are ready. Does that sound about right?"

Stiles swallows hard, and stares at his hands, fingers twisting in the little toy. His hands are too broad, and the veins on the back poke out, blue and wiggly, as he fidgets. He nods his head, barely perceptibly. What she says makes a lot of sense. He hasn't told anyone about the soft, scratchy *Derek* that he'd said on Friday, and Derek hadn't brought it up again, directing nothing but patience and acceptance at Stiles. Stiles still wonders why that word had slipped out so easily, when opening his mouth to say anything else, to vocalize in any fashion at all, seemed so overwhelmingly impossible in every other circumstance.

Because Stiles is a scientist at heart, he gives it a try right now, drawing in breath to power words, opening his mouth to make space for them. Something simple, like *okay* or *maybe* or *I can't*. But nothing comes out. Mrs. Casteel watches him closely, and so does his dad, and his failure to speak makes him feel breathless and unsubstantial, as if he won't exist without words, so he shivers and closes in on himself, elbows in and shoulders hunched forward.

The therapist nods and smiles, reaching over from her chair to pat his hand. "Don't worry, honey. It'll take time, but we're going to work through it. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

There are tears trembling at the bottom of his eyes, warping and magnifying his hands around the toy, and he stares up at the ceiling so they won't fall out, breathing too hard through his mouth. (Stiles thinks about the surface tension of water, and how amazing polarized molecules are, and how they can stick together even to the point of fighting gravity. Anything to avoid thinking about the present.) John moves to sit beside him, slipping an arm around his waist and picking up his hand with the other, offering silent support. And that's – okay.

There's a sustained stretch of time while Stiles tries to reabsorb those tears from sheer force of will, but he eventually gives in and blots them with the tissue his dad tucks into his fist. When Stiles has calmed down a little, he looks back at Mrs. Casteel, face twisting up into confusion and anger. She taps the pad, eyebrows up, and he eventually pulls it onto his knees. *I feel stupid*, he writes.

"Oh, Stiles—" his dad begins, but the therapist shakes her head at him. "Alright," she says. "Do you know why?"

He trails the pen around the page for a little while, staring unfocused at the pale blue lines sectioning the paper. He blushes fiercely, can feel his face turning beet red, feels it move into his ears and down his neck and knowing his embarrassment is so obvious makes him blush even harder. God. He writes, just to distract everyone from reading his flaming face and emotions, *Talking is supposed to be easy for me. A thing I'm good at.*

Whoa. Where did that come from? The relaxed kind of high he'd been floating on all weekend courtesy of Derek and his amazing spanky hands is now officially and wholly abated.

I can't do the things I'm good at anymore.

"What things are you good at, Stiles?"

Talking. Knowing things. School. He squirms, because suddenly his brain is drawing a blank. The whole thing about *selective mutism* makes him think too much about what happened, about *why* it happened.

I'm a bad... he nearly writes *person*, but censors himself in time, puts pen down to write *sub* when he censors himself again. (But that is what he'd thought, the whole time they had him, manacled by his own dynamic, *I'm a bad sub.*) He scribbles it out, thick, angry lines of sparkly pink.

I'm weak.

John makes a noise, and when Stiles manages to look up at him, his face is tense, expression frozen. He holds his hand out for the pad, which Stiles hands over.

Things that Make Stiles Special he writes, looking up at Stiles and underlining the heading.

He begins to write, slowly and deliberately, only stopping periodically in order to think.

Incredibly smart.

Funny.

Loyal.

Dedicated.

Thinks about things from multiple angles.

Loving.

Supportive.

Honest.

Analytical.

Creative.

VERY BRAVE.

Does what's right even when it's scary.

Reminds me of all the happy memories of his Mom. So much of your Mom in you, Stiles.

Good friend.

Amazing son.

I'm SO proud of you.

You are never weak.

John hands the pad back to Stiles who reads it and pulls his mouth in tight, while tears spill silently, fat and heavy and hot, down his cheeks, one after another until they're unbroken streams.

Mrs. Casteel pulls the pad over to herself and adds,

Going through something that is very difficult (for ANYONE, Dom, sub or neutral).

Dealing with it with grace and courage.

Staying silent while your brain processes, maybe? There is a lot to process.

You have NO REASON to be ashamed.

Stiles holds the pad on his knees and rubs his thumbs compulsively over the paper, back and forth, in little windshield wiper curves, and teardrops spatter around the page, salty little water bombs. Dad leans in and puts his arm around Stiles' shoulders, pulling him in tightly, smelling of safety and home and love.

They sit quietly for a while, letting Stiles get himself back under control. Mrs. Casteel discreetly passes him the whole box of tissues, but blowing his nose is anything but discreet, making a jarring honk, and Dad snorts, which makes Stiles smile, too. Maybe therapy won't be such a bad thing after all.

In the final few minutes, Mrs. Casteel and John talk about school. Stiles has missed well over three weeks at this point, and John is worried that he'll have to repeat the year if he can't go back soon, but that he (and Stiles can *feel* him carefully picking around the my-son-is-now-a-werefox-and-he-might-shift-by-accident) has ... panic attacks when he feels overwhelmed or even startled.

Mrs. Casteel is familiar with Stiles' panic attacks, since they started when he first saw her, after his mother had died. She says she'll get the office psychiatrist to write him a script for xanax. But then she suggests something new.

"Are you familiar with service dogs, Stiles?"

Stiles stares at her with wide eyes, suddenly alert and hopeful.

"When *anyone* has been through a traumatic situation, PTSD, a service dog can help, but they've been found to be especially valuable to submissives who have to learn to function away from their Doms. I can get you in touch with someone who's training and fostering some dogs right now, if you'd like to give that a try. A well-trained service dog shouldn't be disruptive at school, and if you need comfort, you can always grab or cuddle the dog. And also, the dog should help to defend you from the environment: people moving too suddenly or too close, that kind of thing."

Stiles' mind presents him with a *vivid* picture of Derek on four paws, enormous, majestic, and thrumming with the potential for unleashed violence in the protection of those he guards. He turns to his dad, letting his eyes do that pleading thing, nodding his head. John, unsurprisingly, folds like a wet paper bag.

So they agree to try it, and John takes the paper with the dog trainer's contact information as well as the script for xanax, and they both leave the office feeling lighter than when they came. Mrs. Casteel had pressed the pad and pen into Stiles' hand as he stood to leave. "Take it with you," she starts to pat his shoulder, but pulls back with a wry expression, folding her hands before her belly. "Communicate when you want to: this puts *you* in charge of what you say. I think you might find it easier to open up if you can do it in your own time." She smiles at him, and her face looks so much older, suddenly, the soft powdered skin of it sagging into compassion and sorrow. "I'm so sorry this happened to you, Stiles. But we're going to get you through it. You have a lot of people who want to help you, you know that, right?" He nods, and ducks his head, and hurries out after his Dad.

"I'll see you Thursday," she calls, then, giving him a big wave. He lifts his hand, halfway, a weak attempt, but it seems enough for her.

The ride home is silent. Stiles doesn't know what John is thinking, but Stiles is wondering if this dog gig is something he could even *ask* Derek to do. (But he wants to; oh, how he wants to!) Surely Derek has a life. Obviously he does. And he'd been torn from his daily routine just as much as Stiles. (Well, half as much, since he was only there, in that dark basement, for one week instead of two.) Probably he has a job, because, don't all adults? Although he hasn't worked for the past week, as far as Stiles has known. Even so, Stiles can't actually imagine him having so little going on that he'd be all, "Sure, I'd love to parade around a fucking high school all day pretending to be a dog just so you don't panic and turn yourself into a big-eared fox." Psht. Yeah, right. Like, high school is supposed to be bad enough the *first time*. Stiles can't imagine anyone really wanting to repeat the experience.



Chapter End Notes

There. I can't actually discern whether this chapter is interesting or just taking-care-of-business. Ah, well, it's time to give it wings, regardless: it's been a very busy day. (But did you cry when you read John's list? Because I did. When I was a teenager, and suicidally depressed, my mother wrote me a similar list, and I held onto it for *years*, reading it whenever I lost perspective. It meant a lot.)

The gorgeous banner at the top of the chapter is courtesy of [faladraſt \(reblog\)](#), isn't it awesome? Thank you, darling!

Also, [myrky](#) was inspired to do *yet another* fantastic set of drawings, featuring Fennec-ear sad!Stiles and happy!t-shirt collar!Stiles, which I have added here. [Go give her some love and reblog.](#)

And now, as a reward, I'm going to go read [Among the Famous Living Dead](#) by [standinginanicedress](#) which happens to have been finished today, and I caught it purely by chance. I've [bookmarked](#) lots of this author's works, and they're always a good read.

Oh, and lots of y'all seemed worried that the story was nearly over, but although I'm trying to finish writing it, y'all lucky readers still have some 15 chapters to go, so do not fret, there is plenty more to come. I love you dearly! (Also, sorry this is somewhat later than usual. My neighbor had a crisis that necessitated two bottles of wine and a couple of hours of sympathy and friendly bitching. What can you do.)

Service Dog... because if Stiles can't claim PTSD then no one can

Derek and John's arrangement (which Stiles continues to think of as co-Domming), tentatively solidified over several phone conversations, is that Stiles will spend weekends with the pack, and during the week Derek will come over after school and stay through dinner, so that Stiles has sufficient pack-time to keep him stable and healthy.

John and Derek had never specified the Dom portion of the agreement, and Stiles figures that while his dad is *aware* – because John is easily as sharp as his son – he doesn't want to admit that Derek will be acting as Stiles' Dom; and it's easier to mentally file their joint custody under the label of 'needing pack' than it is to classify it as 'needing a Dom who isn't me'. Both Stiles and Derek can afford to be generous, having gained so much, so they won't mention it either. (Or sex. Better to leave that one off the table as well. *Ahem*)

It's been a hell of a day, for a Monday. Not *terrible*. Just, with the intense therapy session, it was emotionally draining. Stiles is lying down on the sofa with a pillow pressed over his face when the doorbell rings. He already knows it's Derek, having heard his car from some distance out, but he is exhausted and kind of brain-dead, so he lets his father get the door.

Stiles hears him say Derek's name in a quiet voice, and smirks a little to himself. Dad now knows how good Stiles hearing is (the video incident was good for something at least), but he can't seem to stop a lifetime of behaviors in a single week. Stiles, staring into the humid darkness of his eyelids, mutters '*Sup*' into the batting. Underneath John's carefully civil greeting, Stiles can hear a little thread of laughter in Derek's exhale, and he rumbles a recognition of Stiles' casual salutation. His returned civilities to John are lowered conspiratorially, just as John's were, and Stiles snorts into the pillow.

John steps outside onto the porch, and closes the door behind him. There are a few random pleasantries, and even through the door Stiles gets a whiff of Derek's confusion and John's faint nervous embarrassment. Stiles sits up and leans back on the sofa, legs folding criss-cross and pillow held on his lap. He closes his eyes (not that he needs to narrow down his senses to focus on hearing: that's too easy), scrunches his nose, and smooths out his eyebrows with his palms, because they'd gotten pushed the wrong way during his not-nap, and now they feel weird, all ruffled and laying against the grain.

His dad finally gets to the point. Stiles can hear the squeak of the porch floor as he shifts his weight from one side to the other. "Derek. I wanted to tell you a little about our visit to the doctors today. Since." Stiles hears John's heart speed up and the drag of fingernails rasping an unshaven cheek (his dad's, he's pretty sure, since Derek's stubble is thicker, longer and softer. Not that he's studied any aspects of Derek's stubble or anything. Except for how he has. Oops.) "I know that you're my son's... *Alpha*. Now that he's a... well... part of your pack." (Stiles wants to snicker at how awkward and obvious his Dad is about avoiding trigger words like *werewolf*, *Dom*, *fennec fox*.)

A subtle squeak of leather indicates that Derek has nodded his head, or at least has bent it to show he's listening attentively.

John takes a deep breath, and his heart pounds and pounds. "I'm sure it wouldn't surprise you to hear that Stiles is suffering from the, *trauma*. The therapist this morning said that's why he's not

speaking. That it's voluntary. In a way. And – ” there's a long pause, until John finally blurts out, “He needs to go back to school, or he's going to have to repeat the whole year. And the therapist suggested a PTSD service dog, to, uh, help him reintegrate at school without panic attacks.” Stiles can hear his swallow, a sharp swash. He's pretty sure he can even hear him blink. “You and I have talked about how Stiles loses control and, *shifts*, when he's panicked, and – ”

Derek thankfully rescues John from his meanderings. “I could do that,” he suggests. “Instead of getting an actual dog.” His voice is light, almost unconcerned, and Stiles would think he didn't really care one way or another except that he can hear Derek's heart, hear the pop of knuckles and creak of denim as he clenches his hands into fists in the pockets of his jeans.

John lets out a long, relieved sigh. “Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, I was hoping you'd say that. He. I really don't want him to have to repeat school if we can help it, and, well, it's clear he isn't ready to go there on his own, even without the risk of *foxing out*.”

Stiles stands up and sneakily creeps to the door, peeking through the side window. John is reaching out to clasp Derek's hand in a handshake, and Derek nods seriously, but his eyes flicker unerringly to where Stiles stands, and one eyebrow twitches with the visible urge to ask Stiles why the fuck he needs to lurk about behind the curtains.

Stiles grins at him before retreating to the sofa. This is going to be *fun*. Suddenly going back to school doesn't seem as bleak and terrifying as it had ten minutes earlier. *I've got this*, he thinks. *We've got this*. And if feel so damn *good* to have someone at his back, someone to share his burdens. Someone stalwart and resolute.

When Derek comes in, politely a couple of paces behind Stiles' dad, Stiles bounces up and rushes over to him. The fox in him is wagging its tail and lowering its head, an invitation to play. Derek's face smooths out into a kind of pre-smile expression, and Stiles jumps up to give him a hug. Derek's arms close around him, heavy and hard and *strong*. The smell of him surrounds Stiles, crisp leather of his jacket, loam and evergreen, the sting of fresh, cold air, and Stiles sighs into it, goes boneless against his chest. Derek's breath is still warm and aromatic with coffee, and he dips his head to rub his stubble against Stiles' cheek, marking him.

John mumbles something, and Stiles can smell his discomfort, a little sorrow, a little jealousy; but he ignores it. It's been a heavy, info-dump kind of day, and he's dealt with it pretty well, all told, and he's *earned* a fucking snuggle with his Alpha. His Dom. And he'll take it, dammit. John's heartbeat recedes, and Stiles hears him sit at the desk in his study. He and Derek are out of sight, now, if not hearing.

He pulls Derek to the sofa, pushes him down (Derek's fond and willing to be maneuvered) and then drapes himself across him, bridging his lap with his legs, body tight to Derek's side. He scents Derek himself, unabashedly rubbing his cheek against Derek's neck, catching the corner of his mouth at the point of Derek's jaw. Scenting releases a cascade of hormones within him, something he's noticed before, and his blood sings with the drugging cocktail of comfort and inclusion.

Stiles is happy, although he knows it's a little unreasonable, given his circumstances, he lets himself have it – let's the stress of the day drift away. He has a label for his inability to speak – selective mutism – and he likes labels: they make things manageable, give him a research target. (When he was seven, learning that he had ADHD went a *long* way in soothing him, knowing that it was a disorder, that the thing everyone always yelled at him for was actually, physically, diagnosably *not* his fault.) He's about to go back to school, which, although scary, also means that life is getting

back to normal, and he has the undivided attention of his Dom/Alpha, and will get to take him along to school, too. What's not to be happy about?

They're interrupted by the crisp slam of a car door, by the sound of boots clattering up the steps. By the time John exits his study to answer the doorbell, Stiles and Derek are sitting up straight, a safe two feet between their bodies. The knowing curl of John's lip as he passes lets them know they aren't fooling anybody.

"Chris!" John's voice is lit with something Stiles hasn't heard in a long time, and he goes very still, suddenly. When did his dad and Mr. Argent have a chance to get close? He knows that they, in addition to Derek, have still been working on finding the rogue hunters over the weekend (now that they know the hunters are still hanging around town because of Stiles unfortunate encounters with both of them on his desperate and foxy run through downtown on Friday.) But his dad smells pleased to see Chris. Pleased and... *interested*. What. *What*.

Stiles looks over at Derek, face pulled into an expression of incredulity and vague disgust, but Derek just shrugs. He can smell it too, the faint, savory strain of *attraction* that wafts from the two men at the door, an alert kind of attention, as if their very molecules are shifting polarity, ever so slightly, just to be more aligned with the other's.

Stiles leans forward to snag a pad of paper off the coffee table and writes **WTF???** which Derek reads over his shoulder. He huffs, and the hot puff of breath against the side of Stiles face literally makes him break out in goosebumps, which is so unfair. Stiles holds his hands down low, hiding them behind the back of the sofa, and jerks them in a back and forth gesture, trying to encompass the utterly unexpected scent of attraction between his dad and this... *hunter*.

"Seems natural to me," Derek mutters, quietly enough to be inaudible to the two men who still stand at the door, talking about nothing in particular as far as Stiles can tell. The fucking weather. *What???*

How so? Stiles writes. **Dad isn't** - he pauses, and then turns to mouth the word *gay* at Derek, unwilling to write it down where it can be discovered. Because while Stiles' parents had had a homodynamic relationship, it had also been purely heterosexual. Stiles shakes his head and jerks his eyes toward the door in a comically exaggerated move. *He's neutral*, Stiles mouths.

Derek narrows his eyes and his eyebrows play a charade of confusion. He shakes his head minutely. "Argent's submissive," he corrects, sounding vaguely confused that Stiles doesn't know this - he must have some weird wolfy instinct about it.

Stiles silently flails. *No fucking way*, he tries to semaphore with his limbs. Evidently, he's a little overenthusiastic, because he slips off the sofa with a crash, after clipping Derek on the ear, which makes Derek snort and John and Chris both suddenly take notice of them.

John rolls his eyes, but smiles a little, clearly happy to have his son back, in all his awkward glory. "Here, come in my office, Chris," he says, stepping back and holding the door open. "We'll talk about it there."

Chris saunters past the back of the sofa, nodding to Derek and smiling almost uncertainly at Stiles. "I'm glad to see you got back okay, Stiles. After, um, Friday," he says, and then nods to Derek as well. Stiles just stares. Mr. Argent is all lean body and long legs and attractive blue eyes. He's intense and smooth and ... *prowly*... and Stiles really isn't sure how he feels about that. He doesn't have time to come up with a reaction strategy, though, because John follows right behind. As Stiles

pulls himself to his knees, John reaches out and scrabbles his hand fondly through Stiles' fuzzy hair (which Derek had helped him buzz over the weekend, to Stiles' relief, because he never wants anyone to grab it and make him do things, ever again). "We'll order pizza for supper, son. You'll be okay for an hour or so."

Stiles knows his mouth is dropped open. His mom used to tease him about catching flies. Thinking of Mom makes him squint at his dad. Whatever the hell he's up to....

John seems to pick up on his son's thoughts, because he lifts his shoulders slightly and ducks his head before seeming to recall himself and straightening back up in a *I am the Dom in this household* posture. "I'll be in the office, if you need me," he says, and follows Chris's gently swaying hips.

Stiles stares after them, and doesn't move until Derek traces a forefinger along the line of his jaw and gently pushes his mouth shut. He's grinning, the bastard.

Stiles jerks his thumb in the general direction of the two adults, and he can feel his entire scalp sliding back as he raises his eyebrows as high as they can go.

Derek hauls him back up onto the sofa and misses the cushion where Stiles had been sitting, purely accidentally pulling Stiles to straddle his lap. Stiles doesn't resist for two reasons. One is shock. Because. What the hell, Dad, are you putting the moves on a *hunter*, on a *man*, and on a person that Derek is insisting is a sub in disguise - although that *does* explain why Stiles had kind of automatically responded to him, even on the first day (well, after first freaking out because of the smell of *hunter*) with a bizarre instinctive trust. The other is, well shit, *Derek*. Who *wouldn't* want to be on the man's lap. Hard thigh muscles bunch up beneath his ass, and he slides himself even closer, digging his knees under the back cushions until he is perched flush against Derek's chest, staring down into his face.

Derek obligingly looks up at him, still smirking. "They've been working together most of the past week," he murmurs, fingers coming around to toy with Stiles hips, pressing into his skin in search of the divots next to the base of his spine. Stiles inverts his back, giving Derek a little more to hold on to. "Couldn't you smell it?"

Stiles gives him the crazy eyes, and Derek distracts them both for a moment, sucking at the skin over Stiles' collarbone. There is a brief pause while Stiles gasps, shivers and moans. And maybe grinds a little. Hey, Stiles is shameless and opportunistic, alright?

Then Stiles recalls himself to the conversation. (Hmmm, maybe he forgot his Adderall this morning? Oh, wait, the doctors. Nope. No excuse, then.) He points to his own naked neck and then flaps his hand in the general direction of the office.

Derek, bless him, gets it. "I'm telling you, he's a sub," Derek insists.

Alright. Two things. Firstly, Dad has never shown interest in a sub. Mom was a Domme, and that had always suited John fine. Stiles always got the unspoken impression that Dad thought subs were... maybe a little weak. Maybe a little unworthy. Also, everyone always said that Stiles was one of the only male subs in town, the coded part of that statement being that male subs were freaks, and rare by definition. Secondly, Chris wears no collar. Stiles bunches his brows together. No wedding ring, either though. Still, he draws his finger in a line back and forth along his throat as if he's saying *Off with his head* rather than, *Where the fuck is his collar then?*

Derek's fingers work distractingly under his shirt, tracing delicate patterns on his skin, circling around the bumps of his moles as if he's already memorized their placement. "You know a lot of male subs don't wear collars, right?"

Stiles drops his arms from where he'd begun playing with the duck tails at the nape of Derek's neck and puts them on his hips. *No.* That is not something he'd known. What the fuck is up with that? No one ever told him that. What they're taught in school is that subs *need* collars, and Stiles own life is supporting evidence of that. A sub needs a collar to keep him anchored, just as a Dom is a fucking loose canon if they don't have a sub to calm them down (and he can certainly attest to the assholishness of Doms... that being one of the reasons he *doesn't* want to return to school, and one of the reasons he'll be so glad that Derek's going to accompany him. He isn't *weak*, okay? He's just ... *smart*. It's good planning. Avoiding catastrophe is *smart*, dammit.)

"Isaac doesn't wear a collar," Derek says quietly. He leans back a little, to focus better on Stiles gobsmacked face. *Isaac???* Well, actually, that one's not a stretch. That boy certainly behaves submissively. But. Is that even allowed? Why isn't anyone following the rules, goddammit. Is Stiles the *only one???* He clutches around Derek's shoulders, entire world reeling.

"His father wouldn't let him," Derek continues. "And now he's afraid to. I don't push it."

Okay. Stiles is just gonna file away for later the fact that there's another sub in the pack. He.... He isn't sure how he feels about that, whether he should be jealous or happy to have company. *Can you smell it?* he writes, having contorted himself into a twist to grab the pad without leaving his lovely perch atop Derek's thighs. He presses the pad against Derek's shoulder for stability as he scrawls, *What do subs smell like?*

Like a total dork, Stiles lifts his arm to get a good whiff of his armpit. Is it that undertone of lime, maybe? The warmish, spicy scent? The kind of weird, pickley smell that's just sweat? There's nothing there that particularly smells like Isaac or Mr. Argent as well. Derek, the freak, grabs his arm and holds it up, nuzzling into his armpit like the animal he is, and Stiles isn't sure if he's glad it's fucking winter and he's wearing layers, or sad that Derek isn't nibbling directly on his skin. He jerks back, but doesn't have time for more than that, because the damn doorbell rings AGAIN.

What the hell is his house, Grand Central?

That Was Not REALLY a Challenge You Caveman; or, Yes, Derek is a Troglodyte

There's something about the heartbeat on the other side of the door that seems familiar; Stiles is so busy trying to decipher the slightly elevated rhythm that he doesn't notice Derek going rigid and... cold... underneath him. Stiles sniffs a little obviously, snuffling in the gentle current of air that wafts under the front door, and catches floral notes, maybe vanilla, and definitely that weird musky bottom note that screams Chanel N° 5.

Ah. Lydia.

He looks down at Derek, and for a moment they wear matching *Oh fuck* expressions. What on earth is Queen Lydia doing at his house?

Lydia apparently decides she's been waiting long enough, and goes for knuckles rather than pushbuttons this time. *Raptaptap*. Her knock is as decisive and sharp as she is.

Dad is evidently distracted with Mr. Argent (and Stiles isn't sure he even wants to *contemplate* that), so he pushes himself off Derek's lap and promptly trips over Derek's feet. Derek grabs his arm, hand striking out so quickly Stiles hardly sees more than a blur, and pulls him back upright before he hits the floor, rising up at the same time. Then he stalks right on Stiles' heels as he goes to answer the door, looming aggressively over his shoulder. Stiles rolls his eyes, and pulls the door open just as Lydia starts rapping once again.

She serenely pulls back her bunched fist, and clearly they're not going to be mentioning how she'd been banging the door down in her impatience. Stiles is willing to go along with that. He opens his mouth, remembers he can't (doesn't) speak, and kind of gives a dorky little wave instead. If he were more coordinated, he'd smack himself in the face at the move. Ah, well. Whereas he'd had a crush on Lydia for many years, he has Derek now, and even he can see that a bird in the hand etc. etc., and besides, Derek is pretty fucking awesome, and really, maybe there's no competition. I mean, Lydia is merely aggressively neutral, after all. Not a Domme. Definitely a mismatch for Stiles' whole... *subness*.

Lydia holds a stack of books and papers in her arms, managing to look glamorous even in the mundane and somewhat juvenile act of clutching school books. Her long red hair is twisted into a single curl over her shoulder, curving alongside one perky breast. "Hello, Stiles." How does she make a simple greeting sound somewhat menacing? "And Derek Hale," she adds. "Fancy finding you here."

When Stiles continues to gape, and Derek continues to loom, Lydia gracefully pushes past them into the house. Her eyes dart around, cataloging the living room, and Stiles feels uncomfortably sure she knows exactly how old all the furniture is and how long it has been since anyone vacuumed the carpet (possibly a couple of months. Stiles isn't a *clean-y* kind of sub, okay?) She evidently decides the living room isn't up to her standards and marches for the kitchen instead.

Stiles trails after her, mouth hanging open, because he's smooth like that.

Lydia drops the books on the table with a smart *bang* and then very deliberately seats herself behind them after discreetly swiping down the seat of the chair. It probably had breakfast crumbs

on it. Stiles will be embarrassed about that later, when he's not quite so dumbfounded.

"So, Derek," Lydia says. "How is your pet... Stiles?"

Derek looks... positively *shifty*.

Omg, thinks Stiles hysterically, Derek is a SHITTY liar, who knew?

"His name isn't Stiles," Derek growls. Stiles can feel the pounding of his heart, pressed up against Stiles' shoulder blade. Somehow, he actually resonates with Derek's tension, which is discordant, because those are Derek's reactions, rather than Stiles', echoing panic and protectiveness and suspicion through the bond. Stiles, while in his typical awe of the girl, is hardly *wary* of her.

"You've missed three weeks of school, Stiles," Lydia continues implacably, noting and ignoring Stiles' slack-faced surprise and Derek's narrow-eyed suspicion. "And no one knows exactly why." Her eyes flick between the two of them, offering a space for explanation, but although Stiles mouth is open, he really has nothing to say. Even if he could. Which he can't: he can feel the barrier in his throat, psychological or not, impenetrable and inarguable. He won't be speaking today, no sir.

Lydia has long fingernails, and they're painted a kind of disgusting shade of green. Flawlessly, of course. She taps them across the top book, which Stiles can see is his AP World History textbook. Someone must have given her access to his locker.

The silence lengthens.

Derek begins to growl, a subvocal sound that Stiles hopes Lydia can't hear. He reaches behind him and tries to subtly swat at Derek's leg. As if *growling* would make Lydia less suspicious.

Lydia gives a fake little cough. *Coughcough.* "Oh, Stiles, do you have a Coke or something?"

Dumbly (and the two meanings of the word suddenly occur to him and almost make him snicker, because, apropos), Stiles lurches back to standing and pulls a can of Coke out of the fridge: Lydia may be neutral, but her suggestions pack the same punch as an order. Derek's growl escalates, loud enough so that maybe Lydia can hear it now, and he rips the can out of Stiles' hand, pops the top, and plunks it in front of the girl with a bit too much attitude.

Almost as if this confirms something for her, Lydia smiles, looking like she eats secrets for breakfast. Derek and Lydia stay still, and if they were cats, Stiles is pretty sure their backs would be arched and there would be hissing. Some yowling, perhaps. He hopes that Derek's eyes aren't glowing.

Stiles himself just sits back down and continues to gape.

Lydia leans back in the creaky old wooden chair and smirks at Derek before looking back at Stiles. "You've missed a lot, of course. And if you don't come back soon, then all your teachers have said that it'll be too late to recover. I wrote down all the assignments you missed," she taps on a loose paper tucked inside the book.

Stiles is still bamboozled. Why is Lydia here? She's never paid any attention to him before, and if she had, it was usually to stand behind Jackson and his bullying coterie and laugh that grating, high-pitched 'dimwitted debutante' or whatever that she'd adopted since starting high school.

Lydia tips her head back and looks down her nose at him, in spite of the fact that, even sitting, he towers over her. Her green eyes shine faintly, and Stiles thinks it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to make them the eyes of a tiger or some other hunter, lethal and unrelenting. "You can say something any time, now," she suggests. "A *thank you*, perhaps?"

Yeah. Stiles flaps his mouth for a minute before making a rusty sound. His face burns, all the way out to the tips of his ears and down his neck. He can practically feel the blush on his hands.

Derek has evidently reached his limit for lurking in the background. He steps behind Stiles and rests his hands possessively over his shoulders, running them under the curve of his collarbones as if claiming his very blush. "He can't speak," Derek grates. "You'll have to talk to me."

"Really?" Lydia looks a little taken aback, distracted from whatever mission she'd had when she came here.

Stiles, stupidly, intervenes with another creaky sound, and Derek's hand moves up to curl around his throat, thumb marking the edge of his jaw and fingers digging lightly over his carotid artery as if measuring his pulse.

The echoing crackle of carbon bubbles popping inside the Coke can is the loudest sound in the kitchen for a long moment. As if recalled to herself, Lydia picks it up and takes a couple of sips. She stares at Derek's hand, wrapped around Stiles' neck, and Stiles *knows* she's thinking about the fact that he wears no collar.

Derek leans over Stiles' shoulder and scoops the stack of books and papers towards their side of the table. Stiles can smell aggression and defensiveness: Derek moves like a predator, massive and powerful and calculating, all, as if he can crush the petite girl before him whenever he deems it necessary. Stiles wants to poke him in the ribs, get him to back off a little. But something holds him back, a sub instinct, maybe, or the tumult of their bond, the stinging way it stretches taut and fierce between them.

"Thank you," Derek says, clipped. He stands back upright and pulls Stiles willy nilly out of his seat to stand next to him, snug in the bend of Derek's arm, ownership blatantly declared. "We'll take it from here."

Lydia's heart pounds, and she smells both afraid and... satisfied? The discordance of fresh mint with mordant trepidation is physically disorienting, and Stiles shakes his head a little to clear his nose. He watches from the enclosure of Derek's arms as she stands: her breathing is a little choppy, but she nonetheless sports a smug little smile, deliberately moving as if to make the statement *I'm not afraid of you... look at how I'm not running in terror*. Stiles can respect that, he really can, because the menace dripping off Derek is getting *him* all riled up. (Probably in a *very* different way than Lydia would be, however.)

"Of course," Lydia answers, and she clicks her way out of the kitchen and down the short hall. It occurs to Stiles, absurdly, that this house hasn't seen shoes with stiletto heels, well, in his entire memory. (He really can't imagine his mom in such a getup.)

"I hope to see you at school soon, Stiles," Lydia says at the door. She sounds actually sounds sincere. "And Derek," she keeps her eyes on Stiles'. "I can't wait to see your... fox... again." She winks. *Winks*. And then flounces out with a demoralizing air of having learned more than they intended to reveal.

As soon as the door closes, Derek locks it, grabs Stiles, and growls into his neck. His fingers close too tightly around Stiles' arms, but he likes the way it feels, likes the thought that his skin is turning red under Derek's hands.

He hums a little at the Alpha, strokes his hands soothingly down his arms (copping a lascivious feel across his biceps while he's at it). Then he nudges Derek's face up with his nose and as soon as he has Derek's attention contorts his face into a *What the fuck was that about dude?*

Derek's growl escalates. "She's challenging me for you," he finally says. "Or, just letting me know that she *could*." He's let his control lapse a little, and his eyes flash red and stay that way, teeth growing sharper and more crowded in his mouth.

Stiles huffs disdainfully and rolls his eyes. *No way.*

Derek ignores him and sucks a bruise onto his neck, well above the collar and clearly visible. Stiles... forgets to push him away, and kind of floats for a few minutes, enjoying the suck and pull of Derek's mouth, the way heat rises in his body like a tide, the curious lassitude that spreads in its wake. Derek mumbles something into his skin, and eventually Stiles tears himself away to retrieve the little pad. "**NEUTRAL!**" he writes. *No threat, doofus.*

After a second's thought, eyes on the spiderweb at the corner of the ceiling, he adds, *Also, she hates me.*

Derek stalks forward and snatches the pad from his hand, pitching it onto the sofa, and then herds him backwards towards the stairs, hands running all over his body as they move. "She's. A. Domme. Stiles," he says. "You always take people at face value, when usually they. *Lie.* She's a Domme and *she's interested in you.*"

Stiles shakes his head, because, fat chance. (Although, really, Lydia being a Domme makes a hell of a lot more sense than her being neutral. He's always reacted to her as if she were, regardless of her loud and frequent declarations about her lack of orientation.) But he's distracted then by Derek grasping his hips and picking him up, pulling him in so that he has to cling with arms and legs as Derek mounts the stairs three at a time.

They're in Stiles' bedroom before he can get in his next exhale, and Derek (very quietly) locks the door behind them before dumping Stiles on the mattress, where he bounces and tries not to accidentally poke himself in the eye. He can't help grinning, because Derek is a grouchywolf who doesn't like it when others touch his things, and Stiles can be down with that, yes he can indeed. He wiggles up on the bed until his head is on the pillows and tries to look sexy (although he's aware he probably just looks inebriated or really sleepy or something else stupid.)

Clearly Derek doesn't mind, because he's shed his shirt and shoes almost before Stiles even realizes he's getting a strip tease, dammit. Derek whips his belt off as well, dropping it beside the bed before kneeling on it, falling over to plant himself on one hand over Stiles. "Okay?" he grunts.

Well then. Barely verbal is gonna be a thing for both of them, evidently. Stiles nods vigorously. Whatever just happened between Derek and Lydia, if it results in some scenting or some good times for Stiles, he's not complaining. He enthusiastically gropes at Derek's body (because! Derek!), both hands cupping broadly curving pectorals, fingertips digging in and palms pressing flat to feel the tight beads of Derek's nipples through thick curls of chest hair. Fuck, yeah, he wants to feel that right against his body. He'll let go, in just a second, and get his own clothes off. But man, is it hard. It just. Feels so. Fucking. *Awesome.*

Derek seems happy to let Stiles do all the fondling he wishes as he maneuvers Stiles' (too many) shirts up to his armpits. Stiles has to drop his hands briefly from his fumbling frenzy of caresses, allow Derek to pull the wad of material over his head, but then can't get back into position because Derek traps his wrists above his head.

"You're mine!" he snarls, biting chidingly at the corner of Stiles' jaw. "That bitch doesn't know what you're worth and she can't have you."

Oookay, caveman, Stiles doesn't say, mostly because he's too distracted by the crisp scrub of Derek's chest hair abrading his sensitive nipples. *Fuck* that feels good, why hasn't anyone ever said what an awesome sensation that is? He shimmies and squirms under the heavy, delicious weight of his Dom and opens his legs to wrap them around Derek's hips. (What, he's always heard how important it is to ask for what you want, because miscommunication is a bad thing. Forward schmorward. Or something like that. Anyway, Derek's clearly into it.)

Derek presses him down again with a lascivious twist of his hips and kisses him hard, lips working Stiles' open and tongue dominating his mouth. Happily, Stiles rubs and wiggles, mouth lax under the determination and focus of Derek's. Fuck, yeah, Derek's tongue is pointed and solid and *determined*, sweeping into the proffered space in his mouth, winding around his tongue and totally schooling it as to who's boss.

Stiles lets him have it, and both of their chests vibrate with their moans, the low, sporadic grunts released when one jean-covered erection grinds up against the other. Stiles twists his wrists, and Derek's hands tighten around them warningly, satisfyingly, god, and he drops down harder with his weight, completely containing Stiles with his body alone. Stiles melts under it, feels the dissemination of sex hormones inch by inch as they wash through his body, relaxing his muscles, making his temperature rise and blood race southward and to the surface of his skin; his cock is hard, his perineum and asshole feel swollen and tender, throbbing. The laxity of his body makes him pliant in action as well as form, and Derek groans when he feels the transition, Stiles knows he can smell it, too, the ripe scent of Stiles' surrender.

"Yeah," Derek grunts, circling his hips against Stiles', primordial mentality apparently fully engaged (although who is Stiles to talk, since he's clearly feeding off it?) "Baby, you do such *things* to me," he shifts to hold Stiles' wrists with only one hand and slides the other under his head, lifting it up and tipping it to the side so that he can slide his mouth from Stiles' lips to his ear, breathing into it hot and humid, and Stiles very nearly unintentionally orgasms at the intensity of the sensation rippling through his body like electricity. "You're *mine*."

Stiles lifts his legs higher and coils up, trying to angle his ass upwards but stymied by Derek's weight. He makes a protesting noise, and Derek lays his head back down and scoots back onto his knees, helping Stiles curl upward, hand under the small of his back and easily manipulating his body. Stiles hooks one leg over Derek's shoulder and the other he wraps high around his back. Derek comes in hips first, and Stiles can feel the hard line of his erection, pushing against his ass, right where he's buzzing and receptive.

They share a couple thrusts that way, but it's fucking frustrating; Stiles can't really feel Derek where he wants him, and Derek growls as well. He wraps his hand around the waistband of Stiles jeans and tugs, "I want these off," he says, but Stiles knows it's a question, knows Derek's trying not to freak him out.

No freaking out going on here right now. Stiles bobbles his head, *Yeah, yeah, fuck, do it.*

Derek wastes no time in pulling the jeans down and off, throwing his body back on top of Stiles as soon as his feet are free. He's left Stiles in his boxers, but they're pulled askew, and Derek runs his hand through the pubic hair that's exposed, grips the length of Stiles' erection and straightens it out so it's pointed right up his belly.

Then he slips both hands under Stiles' ass and lifts it up, scootching forward to wedge his knees under there, keep Stiles propped up, and he very deliberately tucks the cotton into Stiles' crack, making a space for his cock to jut in there.

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut and pants loudly, shivering. Yes, yes. He reaches between them and tugs at Derek's pants, too, fumbling with the closure. He wants to *feel his damn cock, fuck*, not just an amorphous bulge strapped in with denim. Derek's eyes are red (*They've been red this whole time, haven't they? What is Stiles' life that he stops noticing when people have glowing red eyes and fangs???* *What, indeed.*) as he unbuttons and unzips, freeing his erection without any ceremony. Quickly, as if to spare Stiles from panicking at the sight of it, Derek ruts back into Stiles, dropping to his elbows, adjusting both of them until Stiles' legs are positioned over his shoulders, body folded in half.

And there's the tip of his cock, just, *rightfuckingthere*, poking at Stiles' asshole through the nearly nonexistent layer of boxers, and Stiles nearly yelps. As if he can tell, Derek slaps a hand across his mouth, pressing him down, pinning him under some 250 pounds, crushing Stiles' chest and rolling so that Stiles can feel his nipples swell, feel the fat head of Derek's cock shoving between his cheeks, poking at the twitching hole it can't quite penetrate. "Shhhh," Derek gasps. "Baby...."

And that's the last word spoken. The rest of it is a blur of grinding bodies, sweat and musk, cresting sensation so powerful that it blurs the line between painful and exquisite. Stiles thinks his anus must be gaping, because he can feel Derek's cock pushing in wet fabric, and his thighs tremble like they're palsied, and he closes his eyes so that he won't see his feet waving in the air, doing a ridiculous dance, uncontrolled shaking.

Derek pushes at him, and Stiles rocks on the tight bow of his spine with each fierce thrust. One hand is planted next to his head, and Stiles opens his eyes to glowing irises, looks away, knowing his own eyes are black, watches the cords of muscle move on Derek's forearm. He clings to a bicep with one hand, and holds the forearm to his mouth with the other, sucking on the round knob of a sweat-covered wrist bone. Derek tastes like he smells, and Stiles is suddenly aware of *everything*. Derek's heartbeat and his scent, the dust motes kicked up from the bed by their vigorous movements, the slick feel of sweat between their chests, Derek's abdomen rubbing in sensuously deliberate movements over his cock, the relaxing of his asshole, the way his skin seems to plump wherever he's touched.

There's the flash of red eyes, and then Derek drops his head and *bites*, high on Stiles' neck, under his ear (*yeah, I know what you're doing, you troglodyte, marking your territory*) and Stiles literally explodes, all that heat and tension spewing out of his cock in spurts integrated with the furious pounding of his heart, and this feels like a livewire through his core, electricity in plasma form that strips burning in the guise of semen, slicking the hairs on Derek's belly. And then Derek growls and comes as well, thrusting in a little further with each spate, searing the delicately sensitive skin in the crease of Stiles' ass with each liquid pulse, until he can feel it *inside*: saturated cotton where it shouldn't rightly be.

Fuck, yes. That was awesome. And Stiles will say so... well, indicate so... as soon as he catches his breath. And straightens out his legs, because, hey, they might actually be numb.

Derek slips down his body, letting his legs fall to the sides (whew) and then sucks kisses along his belly and chest, hoovering up come and sweat, and that should totally be gross, except for how it totally isn't. Stiles just flops back and hums, lets Derek has his way with him.

He hopes Lydia might stop by every day, because this triggering of the savage beast within Derek was *awesome* and fully appreciated.

He wonders if Derek would agree.

What Makes a Good Dom (alternatively: John gets SCHOOLED)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Claudia was a Domme.”

Stiles’ head whips towards the door. Well, that’s the kind of sentence that will jolt you right out of some well-earned post-coital bliss. He’s got one hand planted on Derek’s bare chest, where he had been comfortably sprawled, trying to push himself up to sitting, before he’s even quite sure what he’s doing.

Derek had been lazily stroking up and down Stiles’ back, toying with the bumps of his spine, tapping a pattern across scattered moles, but now he tightens his arms and holds Stiles still. “Shh,” he murmurs. “What are you planning to do? Just... shhhh. Let them talk.”

Stiles bites at the unfairly distracting and ludicrously ample pec under his face, just because, but does stop his wild squirming.

“So was *my wife*,” Chris Argent’s voice is unmistakably wry. John snorts a little at that, and Stiles gives his head a little shake, bemused. *What the hell?*

“I’ve never-” John pauses for too many heartbeats, and Stiles, involuntarily popping out his fennec fox ears in response to his *intense* curiosity, can hear the rasp of his hand over late-afternoon scruff. “She died before Stiles presented. I’ve never really known how to handle a sub.” He sighs, and there’s the rustle of clothing, the sound of movement, and Stiles wonders what those two are doing, down in his father’s office. “I mean, I’m fine dealing with them on the job, and just, out in the world. That’s instinctive. But how do I *teach* one? How do I live with one? And... he’s a *boy*. We just never even predicted something like this.”

“You thought boys couldn’t present as submissive?” Chris suggests. “Or maybe you thought that a child of yours couldn’t be that... weak?”

Stiles can feel himself shrivelling, his skin tight and all his organs going small and burying themselves in deep. This is. This is what he’d always known his father thought, but John had been so careful never to say anything around Stiles. And of course, he wasn’t doing it now, not knowingly. It was just that Stiles could eavesdrop so easily now, with his new ears. He lifts a hand and touches one, large and twitching, silky with fur.

Derek’s arms flinch around him at John’s admission, and his chest vibrates with the prospect of a growl. He turns his face into Stiles’ hair and resumes stroking slowly up and down the length of his spine. Stiles just lies there, rigid and wishing he could literally, physically recede.

“He’s not weak!” John’s voice is rough and emphatic. “God, Chris. He’s my son, and he’s... so *strong*. He’s never, um, never really needed me to do much more than discipline him when he gets too rowdy. You know. Spankings. Grounding. Withholding privileges. He doesn’t... he’s not *needy*. He can hold his own. I. I know they mess with him at school, and he’s never, *ever*, asked me to step in. Always just taken care of it himself. He’s really tough, and I’m... so proud of him.”

There’s the sound of wet dragging on skin, and Stiles thinks one of them just licked their lips.

“Do you think male subs in general are weak?”

“No! Chris, no, fuck,” there’s a brief pause, and Stiles is pretty sure his Dad’s wearing a sheepish smile. “I’ve seen you handling your guns, for one thing.”

Nooo, no. Holy cow, is Dad flirting? Is this possible? Stiles feels a little dirty just thinking about it. He lifts his head to check with Derek, who is laughing silently at the ceiling. Yeah maybe so. That’s just *wrong*, Dad.

“Do you know why I don’t wear a collar, John?”

“Because you’re divorced?”

“I’ve *never* worn a collar.”

John makes a kind of *oh* noise. Stiles wonders if he’s finally sensing that he might be opening a can of worms. “You told me about your father. And your sister-”

Stiles notices that Derek is as rigid beneath his cheek as he feels himself. He sits up again, and this time Derek doesn’t stop him, just shifts around until they’re both seated on the edge of the bed, staring at the floor as if they could actually see the conversation below them, if they just try hard enough. Stiles scoops his shirts off the floor and pulls them on. He feels too exposed. A little sick. A little afraid.

“Huh. Yeah, he was a right bastard.”

There’s another long silence, and Derek uses it to urge Stiles out of his (pretty disgusting) boxers, balling them up to wipe both of them clean of drying streaks of come. Then he tosses Stiles’ soiled boxers into a corner and fishes out a fresh pair from the dresser, all while politely never looking at Stiles’ vulnerable cock, for which he is grateful. (Although that’s absurd. Because he’d seen it not ten minutes earlier: had his hand on it, even. But there’s no logic to fear, and Stiles’ soft cock... sometimes he remembers Rudy, making him hold it to pee, and just. No.) They both quietly finish dressing and put on their shoes. Armoring up. Just in case.

Chris starts up again. “He didn’t want me to wear a collar. Said it was for... well. Let’s just say he thought that being a sub meant being weak, and he didn’t want any son of his showing weakness.”

John makes a small sound, sympathetic and shocked.

There’s more movement, and then the slap of an open hand on a wooden surface. Chris must have stood, moved up to face his father. “If I asked you to tie me down, John, would that make me weak?”

John’s heart rate skyrockets. “No,” he says thickly. Squeaking wheels indicate that he has rolled his chair backwards and stood. Stiles can picture them, leaning towards each other over his father’s messy desk.

“If I asked you to distract me for a while, so I didn’t have to think. Would that make me weak?”

“No! Chris-”

Chris interrupts. His voice is low, smoky and seductive when he speaks next, and Stiles remembers the sinuous way he walked, the predatory prowl as he led his father into the office. “If I were to

invite you to scene with me, John,” (Ew. Stiles feels a little icky, hearing his dad’s breathing go uneven, hearing the blood rush faster around his body. He’s glad he doesn’t smell them, through two closed doors and a full story away.) “If I invited you to scene with me, and you rendered me helpless,” it’s almost a croon, really, the way the hunter speaks, and in the part of Stiles’ mind that isn’t all, *Oh gross someone’s flirting with my dad*, he’s thinking he really should take notes, because this is *hot*, “how would that feel for you, John?”

“Good,” John breathes.

“And how do you think *I’d* like it?” Yep, Chris is purring. Jesus J. Christ, that man’s scarcely had a *week*, and he’s got Stiles’ father completely wrapped around his finger. How did he *do* that? Stiles doesn’t know if he should congratulate him or kill him.

“I think you’d like it very much,” John returns. His own voice is suggestive, dropped into a low growl.

“If it would make me feel good for you to take care of me, John, would you want to do it?”

“What are you-” John gulps. “Yes, of course.”

“And why would you do that?”

John heart slows down a little. Stiles wonders if he’s figured out he’s being guided, rather than hit upon. “Because making you feel good would make *me* feel good. Because seeing you relaxed and content makes me feel the same way.”

“So if I ask for it, if we both get something out of it, am I weak?”

“Of course not. Not at all. Chris. Open communication –”

“Shhh.” For a moment, Stiles’ eyes bulge. Did Chris just shush his Dad? He glances over at Derek, whose lips are pulled tight at the corners, possibly repressing a smile. “Listen. John. We’ve spent hours and hours together this past week. And every time you tell me about how strong your son is, you use it in a context of him *not* asking for things. Not having needs. How resistant he is to orders and control.”

John gives a choked gasp, and his heart is wild once again. There’s the sound of shifting papers, as if he’s clenched his hand into a fist, unheeding of the folders under it. “Oh. Dammit. Chris –” his breaths become choppier, his voice more thick and strained. All signs of flirtation have vanished.

“Are you saying I’ve been letting him down. His *whole life*,” John swallows and sniffs: it’s damp sounding, and Stiles is shocked to realize that his father might be crying. “He. Everyone always says how male subs are... feeble and foolish... and I only ever wanted to prove to him that they were wrong. That he wasn’t –”

“No, no. Listen,” more movement and papers. Stiles imagines Chris walking around the desk and sitting on it, maybe pulling John into his arms, as John’s breathing becomes muffled. “I’m *saying* it’s not black and white. You’ve spent a lot of the last few days talking about ‘losing’ your kid. About what it would mean to hand his care over to Hale.”

Stiles glances down and realizes he’s got Derek’s hand in a white-knuckled grip. He’s shaking, vibrating under Derek’s protectively curled arm. When he looks up at Derek’s face, though, it’s placid, eyes serenely green, not a hint of red. Clearly Derek doesn’t feel threatened at the moment.

"I can't. He's just a kid, Chris."

"Really? Because to me - and I say this as a parent to someone the same age - he looks like a sub who's found his Dom. A sub with a lot of wounds, who has found someone who can help him with that." There's a long interval. Stiles hears breath bouncing off of skin, the faint scratch of bristles, and imagines Chris nuzzling into John, (which is so *weird*, okay, but so much less weird than this whole conversation that he can't even be bothered right now.)

Derek's hand migrates up his arm and begins to slowly massage the back of his neck. Stiles tips his head forward and sighs into it. He's got whiplash from going from vigorous sex to overhearing *this*. His Dad questioning his ability to parent. Getting schooled by a man he's known for less than a couple of weeks. And a *hunter* at that.

But mostly he wants to cry.

Because *yes*.

Yes to everything Chris said. *Yes* to years of hiding the ache inside himself, the confusion and conflict that resulted from *wanting* guidance, boundaries, restraint. From *desiring* to be made small, so that he could grow large again. Just from wanting to *let go*. To float.

But his dad was always so *proud* of him when he didn't. Had mentioned how amazing it was that Stiles could go for longer and longer intervals without being dropped. Was impressed with his control. Stiles had found himself acting out even more than the ADHD actually accounted for, just to get a reset. Chris's point isn't *entirely* a revelation to him, but he's never heard it summed up so succinctly and completely.

Derek hums, thumb and forefinger spanning his neck from ear to ear, digging into taut muscles. His presence at Stiles' side is warm and solid. Reliable. Secure. Stiles pushes himself more fervently into that strength, drops his head onto Derek's shoulder, allowing himself to be gently rocked as those fingers rub and stroke, abating Stiles' physical stress and soothing emotional turmoil.

"Derek's father was a sub, did you know?" Chris murmurs from downstairs. "His mother was Alpha and a Domme. I don't think I ever saw the pair of them when they weren't touching each other. They were," he stops and sighs. "It was a really healthy marriage," he says at last. "I was slow to realize that what Victoria and I had was just as sick as the relationship between my father and myself. I was so envious of the Hales in those days, the way they always seemed aware of each other, dealt with any need the other had before it had even truly been realized. They were the center of the other's orbit, invariably." He gives a little snort. "Not that I saw them that much, you understand. We weren't *friends*. But. But sometimes I wish we could have been."

Derek's scent blooms sandalwood with surprise, and Stiles lifts his head to see his face, but it's still smooth and impassive. Even the eyebrows are quiet, refraining from comment.

"My point, John, is that Derek had a fine example, growing up. I believe he'll be good for your son. You said he didn't even hesitate before agreeing to shift and act as a service dog. And that's. You don't even know how bizarre and... significant... that is, John. You just asked *an Alpha-fucking-werewolf* to play at being a *dog*. In a *high school*. And he didn't even blink, did he? Just agreed. If he'd been any other Alpha, he could have killed you just for suggesting it."

Stiles reaches up to wrap his hand around Derek's, still circling the back of his neck. Derek meets his gaze, somewhat smugly, and his eyebrows start up commentary once again, this time saying that yes, he's awesome, and yes, so is Stiles, and also that he's somehow pleased that Mr. Argent realizes that what he did is momentous.

So Stiles bumps his cheek against Derek's, smiling, and Derek returns the gesture, nudging back. For all that the conversation downstairs is outlandish in the extreme, Derek smells content and relaxed. He shakes off Stiles' hand and then strokes along his ridiculously large ears, pulling them back and letting them spring up, making Stiles shake his head and dodge away, poking the tips of his fingers into Derek's side, aiming to tickle. Derek captures his hands, and there's a short tussle that ends with Stiles laying across Derek's chest, pinning both thick wrists down against the mattress. Derek relaxes underneath him, lifts his head to give Stiles a kiss.

"My family has spent generations studying werewolves," Chris says downstairs, and Stiles reluctantly pulls his lips away, rolling over to lie next to Derek, and they both stare at the ceiling. "Not," he sighs, "not in any kind of... *humane* way. But, they're different. Besides the obvious."

Wheels squeak again, and Stiles knows his Dad is sitting down, putting on his Sheriff persona, ready to take down pertinent information. "How do you mean?" he asks.

"Humans bond, right? There's always a connection between Dom and sub. Sometimes it's so strong that some couples claim to feel each other even from different rooms, right? They are tuned in to each other, sense needs before they're spoken, that kind of thing."

"Yes," John says. And then, as if he can't prevent himself from defending Claudia, adds, "I've always thought that was just something that developed between two people who have history, that love each other very much, regardless of orientation. Something that comes out of love and sharing a life, spending time focused on one another."

Chris makes a small sound, says, "Well, I certainly won't argue that. But, what werewolves have is a whole different ballgame."

"Are you referring to their 'pack bond'?"

"I think that's the core of it, yeah. It's, um, a much more physical thing for wolves. They can literally feel it when a pack mate is in trouble, or, well, whatever the emotion is, it doesn't have to be negative. The Alpha always knows where his pack members are, and it's not always to do with scent tracking."

"Are you saying there's some kind of *magical* link?" John sounds like he's scoffing.

But Chris answers seriously enough, "Well, yes John. Since werewolves are magical creatures already, it's not too much of a stretch, is it?"

John doesn't have a rebuttal for that.

"This, all-encompassing awareness is present in their D/s bonds as well. When separated, they physically suffer. I know you've already seen that with Derek and Stiles. They can share everything from pain to euphoria. They seem *compelled* to care for one another. (Which probably helps them to avoid a lot of our more human misunderstandings.) And then there's the mate bond, which all werewolf mates have, but is the strongest of all between an Alpha and his mate."

There's an expectant pause. John eventually says, disgruntled, "You're saying that Stiles and Derek have this bond? This... werewolf-strength bond?"

"How do you think Derek found Stiles, in a stranger's house, clear on the other side of town, John? I know he did some of it through scent trails, but something that specific and far-flung is only possible if he had a bond-line to follow."

"Shit." Stiles can hear the sandpaper rasp as his dad scrubs his face again, and the vehement sigh that follows. John sounds... stretched thin and off-balance. "This is a lot to think about," he says at last. His voice is muffled enough that Stiles thinks he must be talking down to the floor, and in spite of his delight at all the confirmation Chris has just given him, and the revelations he's dished out, it makes him edgy to hear his father sound so defeated.

Chris says, "I know you love your son, John. And that the last thing you'd ever want to do is hurt him—"

"Yeah," John sighs again. "Fuck. What a day."

"I just want you to know that... part of the reason hunters exist – good hunters, I mean, who follow the Code – is actually for the *protection* of werewolves. We eliminate the rogues, and by doing so, keep the species safe from being discovered by the public at large. Werewolves aren't bad creatures – people – as a whole. And there are a few domains where I consider they've got a better model going than humans do. Pair bonding is one of them. I really don't think your son is in any danger from Derek Hale."

Chapter End Notes

Welp. It appears that the whole spleen thing wasn't a one-off after all, and I have developed a few more aneurysms. They have no idea what's going on (I'll see another specialist on Thursday) but the part that impacts you is that I've had to discontinue my Adderall until they come up with a diagnosis. So I'm essentially a randomly bouncing rubber ball these days, and I'm having a terrible time focusing. If you see any typos or discontinuity, lemme know, 'cause my eyeballs are definitely skipping around. A lot. (Other than that, though, I feel perfectly healthy, spending a lot of time gardening when I'm not devouring fics, and y'all sweet things don't need to worry.)

Finally, School

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all your comments after the last chapter. I appreciate your love and concern so much, you don't even know. Kisses and hugs soft snuggly plushy things for all of you. Also, I'm really excited about how much y'all liked the idea of Sheriff/Chris (is there a portmanteau for that pairing? Stilingent? Jois? Argenski? Chron? Nothing sounds good...). They really need one another, don't they? John's been alone for a long time and needs to shake some old-fashioned ideas, and Stiles needs a strong and confident male sub role model, yessir.

Meanwhile, here's a new chapter for you, 3k words of which I wrote this morning because I'm on top of things like that. *sigh* I think I just jammed three entirely different subscenes together with, more or less, an entire lack of transitions, but, eh, at least you have it on time.

And it's a long one! (Actually, it should probably be broken into two. Consider this my gift to you!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The remainder of the week passes quickly. Derek drops by at least once a day. Stiles sleeps and texts Derek. He starts cooking dinners again, which is such a welcome routine to slip back into that sometimes he'll stand there, hands on the handles of the steaming spaghetti pot, with tears burning behind his eyes, so happy, so *relieved*, to be able to do these simple things once more. Much of his time is spent struggling to catch up on the schoolwork Lydia Martin (!!!) had delivered. With the exception of Harris (of course), his teachers had kindly exempted him from any tests or assignments that he'd missed, since his grades had always been so high; but he still needs to read and understand what they'd gone over if he is going to slip back in without a hitch.

So Derek brings him home early on Sunday, and Stiles tries to mentally buttress himself for starting school the next day. There is a blue *Service Dog* vest on his dresser, delivered via the miracle of Amazon Prime, and Derek has already arranged with John to stay the night. (He can sleep in Stiles' room *if he's in his wolf form*, John adds, and Stiles stifles his snicker that his dad thinks fur will preclude any inappropriate interactions between the two of them, if they're so inclined.)

By late afternoon Stiles is just staring at the wall in the living room, overclocked and weary. He pushes his Chemistry book onto the floor and rubs his hands over his face. He needs a break. He stands up, stretches, rolls his head around on his shoulders and groans loudly. The house is not silent, he's had his Study Hour playlist going on Spotify (heavy on the Massive Attack), but there hasn't been a human noise in a while. Derek looks up from the other end of the couch, closing his book over his finger to keep the place. Stiles groans again, just to be obnoxious, then swings away towards the kitchen. Snack time. The fact that he trips over an end table and falls down *en route* isn't something either of them needs to comment on.

As they munch on apples and Cheetos, Stiles stares thoughtfully at Derek, thinking idly about the betas, who had all gone to their own homes this morning. Derek picks up on his growing focus and his raised eyebrow wonders, *What's your issue?*

Inelegantly wiping the orange dust on his fingers onto his jeans, Stiles lifts a finger and touches Derek gently, just over his sternum. Derek waits, patient, while Stiles tips his head to one side and furrows his eyebrows, chewing on his bottom lip. There's something here. Something....

Afternoon light streams through the picture window, clear and bright, for such a winter's day. Derek's fair skin glows like marble under its touch, starkly contrasting with the geometry of stubble across his cheeks, the heavy line of eyebrows, the charcoal smudge of absurdly thick eyelashes. Sunlight penetrates his eyes - each colored segment of his irises glitters with its unique hue and pattern: gold and blue and green, exquisite in their pellucidity. Stiles' breath hitches at the sight, and he blinks with something approaching awe that he gets to be this close to a creature so preternaturally beautiful. It's hard to look away, but Stiles attention is caught, here....

His focus drops, intensifies, and he presses gentle fingers to Derek's breastbone, thoughtful, nearly straining. His head tips to one side, his eyebrows furrow and he begins to chew on his bottom lip. Hmm. He moves his finger in a slow line, from Derek to himself, as if following a string, and he feels a little vibration, a delicate tug. Stiles taps his own sternum, and then goes back to Derek's. His eyes narrow further.

Stiles follows another invisible line, off to the right, notes that Derek jolts as if he can *feel* it when Stiles' finger alights, as he traces a path through the air, towards the wall. There is the subtle vibration there, the faint tingle. This feels a little like Erica, disgruntled and wound up. He can feel it, but he wants to *see* it.

Through his own bond with Derek, Stiles can feel the Alpha's absorption and curiosity with Stiles as he explores.

Stiles' finger returns to Derek's chest, and he strains a little harder, holding his breath and tensing his muscles, pushing *something* out of himself, from his heart to his shoulder, down his arm and through his finger, until the line he tracks begins to glow, faint and warm and *visible*. He follows it towards the window, tickling against his skin. Stolid concentration, tight emotional control, very faint traces of uncertainty and loneliness. Boyd.

On Stiles' final trip from Derek's sternum, he maps it towards the kitchen, a little to the left of himself. This path belongs to Isaac, is a mess of twisted doubt and self-recrimination, urgent worry and shame. Stiles makes a move of sympathy, when he becomes aware of it, but puts it aside for just a moment.

Derek reaches out, lightly touches the back of Stiles' hand. "You can *see* them?" he whispers, astonished.

Stiles pulls himself out of his head and looks up at Derek, a little dazed and somewhat surprised: he'd been sunk very deep in looking at the bondlines. Now he feels a little drained. He plucks up his ever-present notebook and writes **You can't?**

Derek shakes his head, astonished. "I've. I've never heard of such a thing. I mean. The bonds are clear to me, but only, um, through instinct. And emotions. Not. It's not something you can *see*."

Stiles stares pensively at the web that stretches from the Alpha. Himself, Erica, Isaac and Boyd. He's not sure if he's *seeing* so much as he can make himself interpret those resonations as physical, impose a soft golden glow over the electricity of the connection. Huh.

You're being pulled in a lot of directions. Stiles writes, deflecting.

Derek frowns, but doesn't try to deny it. He nods. "It's always easier when I've got you all with me. When I know you're safe and taken care of."

Stiles feels guilty for a moment, for making Derek abandon his pack this morning and, indeed, every day. But Derek takes hold of his hand and gives it a squeeze. "It's not just you, Stiles," he says. "Isaac is the only beta to live with me. I have to send Boyd and Erica home every day. We deal with it."

Stiles thinks of Erica's tension, Boyd's stoicism and Isaac's repressed storm of insecurity and thinks that it could be dealt with a little better than it is. But, of course, Derek can't just steal teenagers from their homes and move them in with him. He's in an awkward (and potentially illegal) situation. Stiles wonders if Boyd and Erica's families know about werewolves. He assumes not, if they have to keep going home. He writes, ***Tomorrow***, and Derek rumbles his agreement.

"Something to look forward to," he says, and Stiles rolls his eyes. School is going to suck, and they both know it, but, yeah, it'll be nice to see the betas, sure. They drop the subject and Stiles opens his laptop: they've earned a Daredevil break.

Later, when dinner is over and John has retreated to his study, Stiles can't stop thinking about the morning ahead and is working himself into a state. It's just. *Everything*. Everything is so overwhelming. The thought of leaving the house. Knowing that in spite of Derek (and John and Chris) doing regular patrols, the hunters continue to elude them, while taunting them with occasional scent trails that always vanish into a car, merging with all the other vehicles on the road. His skin crawls at the recollection of how school has always been: the teasing and small degradations he's been subjected to due to his dynamic and gender. He's *afraid*, and all these little stresses just seem to add up to the prospect of more hurt and fear and he can't stand the thought of suffering more than he already has.

Derek hurries them through rinsing the last of the dishes, shoving them haphazardly into the dishwasher before dragging Stiles upstairs and into his bedroom. (He carefully leaves the door wide open, because that's one of John's rules if Derek is to sleep over.) He barely gets them over the threshold before he pulls Stiles into his arms. Stiles immediately melts into his chest, pressing himself against that heartbeat, trying to focus only on *heat* and *strength* and *refuge*. Derek rubs his fingers across the back of Stiles' head, a little movement that gently bumps his face further into Derek's neck with each pass.

"Your heart is racing," Derek murmurs, tugging Stiles closer and shifting his arms so that Stiles feels engulfed, surrounded. "You smell of panic and nerves." His breath is hot and humid behind Stiles' ear, and when he speaks, his chest rumbles against Stiles' own.

Stiles clutches at the back of his shirt and shrugs: he certainly can't argue. His heart *is* racing, and he can smell his fear as clearly as Derek. He makes a little *meh* noise, trying to minimize it, but Derek is having none of that.

"Nervous about school tomorrow?" he guesses.

Stiles just burrows deeper, and Derek goes quiet, simply holding him, breathing deeply and evenly. Stiles isn't actually having a panic attack, but he's grateful for the deliberation of Derek's breaths, and follows them with his own, chest rising against chest, face pressed into darkness and warmth, surrounded by the scent of his Dom, by his strong arms, by his implacable certainty, and it helps, it helps, and he gradually calms down.

A few more minutes of this, and Derek's fingers creep into the back pocket of Stiles' jeans. Stiles snorts and wiggles his behind a little, pushing into Derek's fingers. Derek obliges with a huff of laughter, changing his slide into a teasing grope, but he withdraws again before Stiles can think of another playful thing to do, pulls away until Stiles can see that he's got their makeshift collar dangling from his hand, liberated from where it had been carefully stowed away on Stiles' person.

"I have an idea," he says, maneuvering Stiles backward until he is abutted against his desk chair. Without ceremony, Derek slides Stiles' unbuttoned flannel off his shoulders, dropping it to the floor and leaving him in his faded Pac-Man tee. He's lowered to the chair before he has a chance to shiver. Not that it's actually cold.

Stiles can feel his eyes flash, the itching sensation behind them that means they've gone black. He knows the collar in Derek's grasp is just a ragged strip off a T-shirt, but he responds to it as viscerally as if it's real, a formal piece with a buckle, sized to his own neck, with Derek's ownership proudly proclaimed for all to see.

Derek smirks at him, pleased and smug, recognizing Stiles' instinctive response. He drops smoothly to his knees in front of Stiles, but when Stiles moves to spread his legs, to let Derek in, he's stymied by Derek closing his knees around Stiles' feet. Derek keeps him bundled in like that as he draws Stiles' left arm over his thighs until it lies palm up, facing Derek.

Stiles tilts his head and lifts his eyebrows. *What's up, dude?*

Derek gives him a brief, amiable twitch of his mouth, definitely not quite a smile, and holds his forearm with both hands, thumbs stroking up and down the thin bones there, where they jut up under his skin. He holds eye contact and bends down to press a soft, open-mouthed kiss against the blue veins of Stiles' inner wrist.

Stiles is surprised at the banked fire such a simple gesture stokes within him, the swoop of butterflies in his stomach, the sudden heating of blood. He breaks out in goosebumps, and knows that Derek can sense it: sound, sight, scent and touch, all are clearly attuned to his sub. Derek gently places his arm back down across his legs and straightens the length of fabric between his fingers, deliberately sliding the band across the fragile skin he'd just been petting.

Stiles gasps faintly at the touch, and his fingers start to clench, but Derek murmurs *Be still* and Stiles responds instantly.

"I haven't... found the right time to talk to your father about a collar," Derek says, gaze catching hold of Stiles', serious and intent: his eyes are pale but *hard*, and they feel like another weapon Derek can use to protect Stiles if he should need it. It's more comforting than it should be. "But I think we can use this to make you feel... better... now and during school."

Stiles exhales, slow, but doesn't respond because Derek doesn't need a response. He rests his right hand on Derek's shoulder when Derek dips his head back to Stiles' arm and slides the strip of fabric under it, just below the elbow, pulling until it's centered before wrapping it over, making a straight band before wrapping it around again in a meticulously smoothed *x*. Stiles watches, breath

slowing, body relaxing, a sense of pleasant, safe lethargy slowly spreading through him, as a pattern emerges, in stark black against fair skin. A band, an x, another band, and so it goes, from elbow to wrist, every motion deliberate, economical. Each time Derek lays the cloth it is flattened, tightened, tested with a fingertip for safety and security. Stiles muses that perhaps Derek wants to show him, via this scrap of shirt, that he cares for each part of him, every small bit, all the elements and details that are involved in the making of him.

At the wrist, Derek wraps the strip twice before tying a complicated, flat knot and tucking in the tails to blend seamlessly with his design. Stiles watches him, eyes black and wide, mouth dropped open, bones slowly melting into the chair, a hundred percent focused (which is so rare, especially at this time of day) on Derek's fingers, soft – callus-free – but firm and deft against his skin. Derek rises off his heels, the same height as Stiles, now, slouched on his chair. "Is it good?" Derek asks.

"Yes," Stiles breathes, before he has a chance to think about whether he could, or should, speak. Derek tucks a finger under one portion: it's tight enough not to slide, tight enough to feel each winding band of fabric, but not so tight that his skin turns red and white underneath it.

Derek chuffs in satisfaction and rocks back, rising to his feet in a single, smooth movement. He pulls Stiles after him. Stiles is still slack, and lists towards Derek as soon as he's on his feet. Derek hums approval, catching him, molding him against Derek's body, pressing plane to curve, working a thigh between Stiles' legs in a sensual buttress. Stiles' head falls back into the sure support of Derek's palm, and his half-closed eyes shut all the way when Derek presses their mouths together, slotting Stiles' bottom lip between his own in a gentle nip that makes Stiles shudder and moan, melting further. (*Legs, what are legs? Who needs them?*)

There's something different about kissing while standing up. (Stiles has the dim realization that this is the first time he's ever done such a thing.) He's dizzier, proprioception entirely shit; the world is whirling around him, and his stomach swoops and rolls like the kiss is a roller coaster. Derek holds his floppy body close, working at his lips, top and bottom, rumbling a possessive growl all the while. Stiles lifts his heavy arms, gets one around Derek's shoulders, twists a hand through Derek's hair, hanging on for the ride, feels his own body responding with the higher frequency of his own purr.

Derek finishes biting his lips and delves inward with his tongue, the spearing heat of it the only thing in Stiles' world, because he's flying, seriously, flying through stars and planets and nebulae, riding on the comet of Derek, hurtling through star-streaked darkness, sucking on Derek's tongue like it's the last motion he'll ever make, and his purring is broken with little moans and gasps, when he has to pull away to breathe.

They're both hard, but Derek doesn't move to do anything about that: no hands, not even grinding, both of them totally engrossed in their kiss. *Making out*, Stiles thinks briefly, *I'm making out with someone!* before he's pulled back under in the sheer physical wash of chemical rewards.

When Stiles thinks he might turn blue from lack of oxygen, Derek eases his head further back, moves down his jaw and neck, biting and sucking and rubbing, until Stiles is so sensitized from teeth and lips and bristle that he'll probably be glowing for days.

The pull apart when they hear John leaving his office. Derek deposits Stiles, still in a daze, into his chair once again and then rapidly strips off his clothes. Stiles blinks, because *what?*, but that doesn't stop his eyes from dropping immediately to Derek's erection, jesus christ, it's gorgeous, thick and well-veined, paler along the column and glistening red at the tip. He has a foreskin,

stretched halfway back, and Stiles' eyes linger on that, curious and aroused. Before he has a chance to get scared, or consider having a penis-induced flashback, Derek contorts into his shift.

When John pokes his head in the door, Stiles is pulled up to his desk, pretending to read a schoolbook that is upside down in front of him, and Derek is curled at the foot of the bed, ears pricked forward and green eyes serenely directed at the intruder.

Stiles' backpack feels extra heavy, chafing uncomfortably at his shoulders and armpits. He absently thinks it should feel grounding, but contrarily it registers as burdensome: like if he needs to run he'll be anchored down instead. His hand grips Derek's short lead tightly, already slippery with sweat.

School is... incredibly overwhelming to his new senses. The smell of so many bodies, such a large building; a bewildering mashup of sweat, hormones, emotions, food, book fust, chemicals and damp. Stiles feels like he's just walked into a soup. Derek is calm by his side, though, heart beating slow and steady, and Stiles tries to narrow his focus to that. He presses his left arm to his stomach, feeling the strip of shirt, remembering Derek slowly weaving it in a pattern. The binding is hidden under his sleeve, but the fact that he can feel it tugging against his skin helps to settle his frantic stomach.

The hallway is empty, right now: Derek's betas had stuck around to greet them when they'd arrived, but then peeled off to attend their own classes. Dad's conversation with the principal about Stiles' reintegration and the inclusion of his service animal had lasted just long enough for the first bell to ring. Stiles is grateful for that small reprieve.

First period is British Lit, and he slips into the quiet class and immediately takes a seat in the back, not making eye contact with anyone. Eye contact isn't necessary to suss out the room, however: the scent of avid curiosity and surprise spikes in a flood of sandalwood and fennel. The rustle of *everyone* turning around is grating and nerve-wracking, the whispered murmurs as his classmates realize that the missing boy has suddenly returned assault his ears as loudly as shouts.

Stiles struggles out of his backpack and then sinks his left hand into the fur around Derek's neck, looking at nothing else but his face. Derek blinks at him: *Stay calm, I'm here, I've got you, you have nothing to fear here.* He presses his nose gently to Stiles' forearm, reminding him of his binding.

Mrs. Cotton ahems the class back to order, and Stiles tries to calm the shaking of his hands to the point where he can unzip his damn bag. He finally sets pen to paper and tries to write something about Thomas Hardy and some woman named Tess. He honestly has *no idea* what his teacher is talking about and quickly gives up. He wastes a good five minutes wondering how many generations they'll have to wait before Harry Potter will be required reading for high school British Lit.

He cannot block the whispering around the classroom.

Holy shit, Stiles is back

And look at that fucking dog, omg it's huge

Where's he been? Wait... where's his collar?

I can't believe they'd let an animal like that in here, is that even allowed? It's gonna kill someone

I bet his dad was renting him out for some extra cash

(The last one is Jackson, of course: self-centered rich boy, utter crass asshole, and bane of Stiles' high school existence.)

Derek pointedly rises from his politely seated position (which puts him at Stiles chest level) and swings his head towards Jackson. He radiates a restrained menace, and an intensely judging mein. Stiles' mouth twitches a little to note how Jackson's heartbeat jumps, and he nervously ducks his head back toward the white board. "That dog's gonna maul somebody," he mutters to Danny. "And then I'm gonna sue."

Stiles snorts derisively. As if.

Class lasts forever, and although Stiles didn't actually take any notes, he did survive, and he thinks that is something to be proud of, a sort of accomplishment. He'll take it. Baby steps.

His next class is with Scott, thank god, who is already there and has saved him a seat. "Hey Stiles," Scott whispers, loudly enough for the entire room to hear. "Um, hey, Derek," he greets the wolf. Derek nods his head slightly and then takes up his position as sentinel at Stiles' left, alert and calculating; his gaze sweeps over the gathering students as they seat themselves in a staggered rush before the bell rings again.

Scott reaches over and gently punches Stiles' arm (look at Scott, remembering not to grab his neck!) and Stiles smiles weakly at him. Lydia gives both him and Derek a long look before taking her seat at the front with a flounce. Danny and Jackson sit down with a scrape of chair legs just in front of Stiles, which makes him and Scott both grimace. Derek growls very softly, not loud enough for anyone to hear. Stiles thinks he can tell that Stiles finds Jackson particularly bothersome. The rat bastard. (Jackson. Not Derek. Derek is magnificent, and Stiles will go to the mat with anyone who says otherwise.)

This class is history, and they're just watching a film on Lincoln because Señor Heustas (who is also the Spanish teacher) never does more than phone it in. Danny leans back to smile at Stiles once the movie's started. "Hey, man, welcome back. You alright?" he asks. His brown eyes are warm with concern, and yep, there's his dimple. (Danny is a precious ray of sunshine, and Stiles will never understand how he's best friends with a small-minded, sadistic, bullying, overcompensating assDom like Jackson.) Stiles shrugs in response: he wouldn't want to answer even if he could. Scott pats his hand, which is hilarious, and Danny narrows his eyes, frustrated.

"Yeah, we heard a lot about why you were gone, Stilinski," Jackson adds, voice dripping with innuendo.

Derek growls more audibly at that, and when Jackson swings around to look at him, he narrows his eyes and pulls back his lip, showing Jackson some undeniably sharp teeth. Jackson jerks back suddenly enough to make his chair squeal across the floor, and Danny peers curiously around him to see what happened. Stiles grins at Derek, who has transitioned seamlessly into an alert and respectable service dog now that others are looking.

“Control your fucking *dog*, Stilinski, or I’ll have him put down!”

Stiles ignores him, and savors the uric bouquet of fear. (Victory. Ha!)

Between classes is the worst, with hundreds of teenagers gawking at him and talking about him. Rumors fly, and Stiles catches key phrases, and while they make him cringe, he also can feel Derek’s fury through their bond, and somehow that helps to ground him.

He doesn’t eat lunch with Scott this semester, which sucks balls. When he walks into the cafeteria, conversation drops for a moment as everyone stares their fill. A group of girls, Jackson sycophants, laugh, and the usual insults fly. *Sub-slut. Feeble lay. Boot-licker.* The fact that some of those same girls are subs just like Stiles doesn’t ever seem to occur to them: they’ve always treated him as an entirely different species. (Once again, Stiles marvels at the human capacity to compartmentalize complete contradictions. Also, alliteration.)

He keeps his head down and goes through the line. Derek seems to take up twice his actual, physical space, and without actively growling or showing his teeth, is somehow making people nervous enough that they give him a wide berth. With sweaty hands curled around his tray of an unidentifiable cooked-to-oblivion vegetable and “chicken tenders”, Stiles huffs a small laugh at the thought that he’d have been pushed several times by now, normally, and as always, had a 50% chance of “spilling” his lunch.

Seeking a spot to sit, Stiles’ eye is caught by a little ruckus in the corner. A couple of kids stand abruptly, snatching up their trays and flouncing off. The cause appears to be the arrival of a girl in a wheelchair, whose face broadcasts her shock and shame at their pointed rejection. Yep, that looks like the place for Stiles. He nudges Derek with his knee and then makes his way over, getting to the edge of the vast room as quickly as he can.

He smiles a little when he gets there. She’s watching him, eyes nearly solid black in a fine-featured, extremely dark-skinned face. She’s got about as much hair as Stiles, although he can say without envy that she probably looks much more elegant mostly bald than he does. A delicately worked gold collar lies around her neck. Stiles lifts his tray a little, lifts his eyebrows in question, and smiles for real when she nods her head.

“You want to sit with me?” she asks, and Stiles immediately falls in love with her accent, soft and British. It’s like he already knows that she’s classy and clever, just from the one sentence, spoken with her arresting inflection. As he settles his tray and plants his rear on the bench, she makes a wry face. “You’d be the only one,” she adds. Stiles rolls his eyes and tips his head dismissively at the rest of the cafeteria. *Fuck ‘em all.*

The girl laughs. “I’m Cecily,” she says, holding out her hand. “And who might you and this glorious beast be?”

Stiles shakes her hand, and the fragility of the bones folded into his grip make him exceedingly nervous. He hadn’t planned on actually trying to communicate with anyone at school, but this girl is new to him, and seems distant enough from all his troubles and trauma that he feels pretty comfortable. Derek pants approvingly at his side. While he searches in his bag for his pen and pad, Derek goes suddenly alert, emits a very low bark, and then relaxes again. Stiles looks at him, confused, and then follows his line of sight straight to his betas. Ah, same lunch schedule, then. That’s nice.

Cecily watches curiously as he finds his paper and writes, “Stiles and Derek.” before turning it towards her.

Her brows draw together. “You don’t talk?” she asks, and Stiles shrugs again. “Oh. So, you’re Derek and your dog is Stiles?”

Stiles gets a hip-check against his shoulder and looks up at Erica’s feline face. He blinks once, surprised to see her done up in leather, with her cleavage spilling over. At the loft, she’d only worn soft clothes: an old sweatshirt and yoga pants.

Erica drops her tray to the table with a clatter. “The tall, skinny one is Stiles,” she says, “and the surly, fuzzy one is Derek.” Derek scowls at her, a clearly recognizable expression in spite of his lupine face, and she laughs. “I’m Erica,” she continues. “And this is Boyd, and Isaac.” Isaac slides into the last free seat, and Boyd just stands there holding his tray, staring at the kid sitting next to Erica until he audibly gulps and grabs his tray, muttering something about being finished, and gets the hell out of Dodge. Boys sits down in the newly vacated seat and nods a greeting at Cecily, who is covering a smile with her hand.

“And I’m Cecily. It’s lovely to meet you.”

Isaac’s eyebrows shoot up. “Oh. Where are you from?”

It’s a graceless question, but Cecily doesn’t act like it is. “We just moved here from Cardiff. In Wales.” Ah, a Welsh accent, then. Live and learn.

“Really?” Erica, as always, is unafraid to go where no one has gone before. “What on *earth* made you pick small-town California instead? I can’t imagine a reason anyone would cross an ocean just to live here.”

Cecily’s drink slips through her fingers suddenly, splashing to the table. Stiles reaches out to catch it before it tips, speed just a *little* too fast to be human, but he doesn’t think it was noted. Cecily shakes her head.

“My *tad* knows a doctor here, who might be able to help me.” She gestures at the lemonade and then herself and the wheelchair. “It’s a degenerative neurological thing, and I wasn’t responding well to treatments back at home. It might take a while to cure me, *Tad* says, so I wanted to enroll in school while we’re here. I don’t... I just want to continue with my life.”

There’s an awkward pause after that. Stiles thinks about how brave she is, soldiering on with her life in the face of what has to be a shitpile of fear and uncertainty. Whatever is wrong with her, it must be pretty awful if they’ve flown across the world to try to find help. He parses “degenerative neurological”, and comes up with fingers slowly losing their ability to grip, legs to walk, and the eventual collapse of the autonomic nervous system. But here she is, smiling, refusing to admit defeat. It makes Stiles straighten up a little, shores his resolve to make it through this day, and the next. Because he won’t be defeated, either.

Stiles grins at her and waggles his eyebrows, trying to lighten the atmosphere, and she giggles back, trying just as hard.

After that, the group talks about nothing much, and Stiles eats a few bites before sitting back and tangling his fingers in Derek’s ruff. It feels good, feels *safe* to be tight in the middle of these people. Cecily isn’t pack, of course, but she’s certainly not a threat, and seems affable enough.

Half the cafeteria is still talking about him, and his reappearance, but he wills himself to focus on this tiny oasis of support instead.

When Stiles drops onto his bed late that afternoon, thoroughly wrung out, he has to admit that his first day back at school had gone far better than he'd hoped. He unbuckles Derek's vest before kicking off his shoes, and then crawls up on his bed to enjoy the view as Derek shifts back to a gloriously naked human. Derek stretches, keeping his back to Stiles, and Stiles can tell that his own scent has suddenly flooded with the earthy, cloying nectar of pheromones. He gives himself a pass, though, since Derek's ass... his back... his *everything*... is delectable. Derek cricks his neck from side to side with two sharp cracks and then grabs some clothes from where he'd left them on the dresser.

He's fully dressed when he finally turns around, and while Stiles is glad not to see his penis, he's also sad to have missed it. He's self-aware enough, and had enough therapy sessions with Mrs. Casteel at this point, to know that this is him processing trauma, and he needs to be patient with himself. But he is eager to get over his instinctive fear and revulsion. This thought has him frowning when Derek drops beside him.

"Are you okay?" is the first thing he says, taking up Stiles' left arm and pushing his sleeve back to his elbow. He traces the criss-crossing black band of cotton, sliding his forefinger under one loop, testing how tight it is. Stiles leans up, off his pillows, and thunks his head down on Derek's shoulder. He nods, staring down at the blunt fingers on his arm. Derek turns his head a bit, and for a moment, warm breath filters through the scrub on Stiles' head.

Derek wraps his hand around the back of Stiles neck, hot and sure, and squeezes gently. Stiles makes a small hum in response, the sound less creaky than it had been in the past: his voice is becoming more accessible. Now if only he can make himself use it at will.

"Did this help?" Derek asks, still tugging gently on the binding.

Stiles lifts his head to make eye contact, because this is important, and nods enthusiastically. He points to the black cotton, and then to the vest, which Derek had fastidiously put on the dresser, and then to Derek. *All of this helped me, Derek. Especially having you by my side. I'm so grateful, and I know it wasn't much fun for you, but, dude, I never could have done it without you.*

Derek probably doesn't get that much meaning out of some pointing and nodding, but Stiles thinks that perhaps the gratitude thrumming through their bond will do its part to inform him as well.

"Good," Derek says. "I'll be there as long as you need me."

Stiles shakes his head a little, mostly because he's entirely incapable of thinking too far into the future right now. Derek untangles his fingers from the binding and lifts them to cup the side of Stiles' face. "You were so brave today," he murmurs, and his voice drops into that drugging timbre that means he's going to say sweet things to Stiles, shower gifts of praise on the submissive in him. "You made me very happy with how hard you tried, how steady your heart was." Derek tips his chin up a little and presses their lips lightly together, drawing away before Stiles really has a chance to pucker up. Derek's eyes flash briefly red. "There are a lot of assholes in your school," he growls.

That makes Stiles snerk a bit, because yes. *Yes there are.*

Stiles would really like to sit on the bed and make out for realz, but Derek just points him toward his homework and then goes downstairs. Frustrating. Soon the sound of clinking dishware filters upstairs, followed half an hour later by delicious cooking smells. Huh. Derek cooks. Who knew? Stiles is curious about that, but mostly is just drowning in his math textbook, trying to figure out what the hell is going on. Catching up is *not* fun.

Chapter End Notes

When I was 16, I missed 6 weeks of school due to a very serious car accident – I was scalped and my back was broken in 4 places after crashing under a bus. Editing this chapter reminded me of that incident (so long ago!) When I was writing the first draft, I'd forgotten I had this in common with Stiles, heh. Of course, none of the bullying ever happened to me: everyone was astonishingly kind, even people I didn't know knew what had happened and would offer to help carry my books. (I had a *walker*, which is the least sexy mobility aid *ever*, ugh.) All my teachers bent over backwards to help me catch up with minimum fuss and effort. They basically just averaged what I'd had so far and called it my final grade, bless 'em.

Make Him Crawl, He's Begging For It

Chapter Notes

Warning for Stiles' graphic dream in this chapter. Primarily it's about degradation and fear. I make up for it in the second half with all kinds of things y'all have totally been waiting for. (So delicious!!!) Also, as a bonus, it's a veerry long chapter. Skip to the horizontal line if you want to avoid the yuk. Also, watch out for an NSFW picture included at the end of the chapter: make sure no one is standing over your shoulder, my lovelies, and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That night, Stiles dreams. He walks the hallways of his school, Derek's lead in his hand, but when he looks down, Derek is trapped in a Loki-like muzzle, his wolfy head hanging low. The pair of them morph down the hall into chemistry class like long-exposure photography: lockers, doorways, exit signs, and all the faces around them blurred into a linear sweep. In class, Jackson sits in every chair, thirty Jacksons, all taunting him. Mr. Harris lounges at the front desk, and he sneers, "Well? Where is it? You have to turn it in, *pussyboy*."

Jackson leans over and whispers to another self, who passes it on, over and over again, until the whisper becomes a roar, "You need to make him crawl, Mr. Harris. That's what subs want."

One of the Jacksons picks up his textbook and slowly stands up, taking aim. Stiles watches the textbook grow in size until it's thicker than the Oxford unabridged, but he can't move, is caught in the sticky amber of dreams. His eyes slide over to Derek, but Derek is fettered to a chain-link fence that sparks with electricity, and although he is still trapped behind muzzle and leash, he wears his human form, naked and blood-smeared. He lunges and growls, face contorted behind the mask, but crackling blue light holds him bound.

The textbook sails towards Stiles, and his terror grows, utterly disproportionate to getting nailed by a book, but he cannot make himself duck out of the way. Jackson leans over, and now he's talking to Lydia: "The more you hurt him, the better he likes it," Jackson confides like it's a secret. "It's the only way you can get those dirty sub-sluts to respond."

"Oh," Lydia nods seriously, and her red hair flickers over her shoulders like fire. "Because he's a genetic aberration."

Bam! The book hits him in the chest and knocks him to his knees in a disorienting flare of pain. It feels like a whip, slicing into his back, over and over; but he knows it was his chest, knows it is a book and not a whip, because he *saw* it. Mr. Harris looms over by the whiteboard, stoops to waggle a bowl of water near the floor. "Crawl," he says. "You have to turn it in. Crawl, and I'll let you drink."

Jackson joins in, "*Crawl, crawl*" and then his body... scribbles... half-erased and redrawn into Rudy and Gunner and the other hunters, and Stiles can feel stiff boots and metal spurs raking down his back and sides. Standing along the aisle are all his classmates: they bear signs like Olympic judges, *3/10, 5/10, 0/10, FAILURE* and the paper they hold snaps and ripples.

They whisper, staring at him, all those eyes, staring.

“He’s only good for licking boots and doing housework.”

“And taking cock!”

“You can hit that anytime between classes; he’ll suck everyone’s dick.”

“Bootlicker.”

“Kneewalker.”

Stiles is pushed and shoved, rocking to keep his balance even though he’s fallen forward onto his palms, foursquare on the ground, breath frozen in his lungs, skin alternately icy with panic and hot with shame.

In the background, Derek howls, but Stiles can’t turn his head, and his hands are sticky with the blood that’s on the floor. (He doesn’t know where it came from. Is it his? Is it *Rudy’s*? It is grotesquely warm against his fingers, and it smells of terror and coffee.) Mr. Harris leans back on his desk and unzips his pants, taking out his dick. It’s big, and dirty, whilst simultaneously being blurry, as if pixilated for ratings, and Stiles stomach dips and rolls in both fear and disgust.

Suddenly Stiles is naked, and someone... someone he can’t see is touching his asshole, and he can’t turn around, can’t protect himself. With another dizzying telescopic move, he’s somehow on the teacher’s desk, on his hands and knees, and Mr. Harris viciously pushes his head down, so that his ass is up in the air. “And this is the *present* position,” he lectures, but his fingers are wicked sharp claws, and cut into the edges of Stiles’ face even as they crush it into the papers on the desk. “This is why we call subs *tip ass*, or *groveling hole*.” He steps over to write the words on the board: *Tip Ass*. The class snickers. The desk rotates like he’s a prize being displayed on a game show, and Stiles knows the whole room is staring at his ass, open and exposed. He feels the touch of a marker, and somehow he *knows* it’s Jackson, knows he’s going to draw Mickey Mouse across his ass before shoving a bloody whip up inside him.

Behind him Derek starts roaring in rage, in a human voice but not in words Stiles can understand. And Stiles is trying to scream, too, pushing out air, trying so hard, but the only sounds that escape are thin, attenuated moans that no one will ever hear, and Laxmi says, disembodied, over the loudspeakers, “We do this because the only thing he’s good for is keeping his father in line.”

The class, like Romans in the Arena, begins to chant, “Stiles, Stiles, Stiles, Stiles-”

“Stiles! Stiles!”

What.

Oh. *Oh*. That moaning sound is *him*, still trying to scream, and this is Derek, Stiles can smell him, sharp and vivid, shaking his shoulder with one hand, the other wrapped around the back of his neck. He drags open his eyes, and they feel like sandbags, so reluctant.

Derek's face floats above him. His eyes gleam red, but he's bathed in the blue glow of the LED nightlight, so this is not the dreaded cellar, they are *not* in their prison, and this isn't school, and Stiles sits up to grab at Derek as hard as he can, digging in fingertips to make a mark, clutching without regard for consideration or grace, because Derek can't go. He can't go, because Stiles will fly to pieces, might anyway, and everything is terrifying, and he feels sick and slimy and fearful and very, very small right now.

The air is dry and scratchy in his throat, which is ironic, because he can hear rain outside, spattering sideways against the window. Other than that, the neighborhood is quiet, everyone asleep except for the little nexus of Stiles' home.

He coughs and gags a little and then says, completely unplanned, words coming like spurts of vomit, "They say I like to be hit." He discovers that he's crying, so hard that tears alone could account for the rough timbre of a long-disused voice.

"What," Derek says, shocked into an utter lack of inflection.

"At school. Say I want to suck c-, cock in the bathroom between classes. Say I'm only... only good for crawling." He doesn't have enough air to push out into words, buries his face as hard as he can into Derek's neck. Derek, who has wrapped strong arms around him and settled back, pulled him up and over his lap, draped across Derek, head under his scratchy chin. Stiles gasps, choppy, fighting for every word, "They didn't. Say anything. Today. Because you were there —"

Then there are rapid steps in the hall, and John lunges into the bedroom. "Stiles!"

But Stiles just shakes his head and hides his tear-smeared face, tries to get a handle on himself. Over his shoulder, he hears Derek say that it was a nightmare.

"I thought I heard talking," John suggests, strangely timid. After a pause, he comes closer, and Stiles can hear the way his bare toes curl into the carpet as he walks.

There's a short pause, wherein Stiles continues to hide, ostrich-like, before Derek says, "I was trying to wake him up. I was the one talking." It's not a lie, but not the truth either, and Stiles is so grateful, because he's not ready, he's really just *not ready* for his Dad to know about his voice.

John leans a knee against the edge of the bed and lays a hand on Stiles' back, but Stiles doesn't move. He hears his father sigh, and the press of a kiss on his head before John retreats, muttering something to Derek about guessing he'll fetch him if he's needed and put on some clothes for god's sake.

Derek settles his shoulders more comfortably against the headboard, adjusting Stiles' weight so that he can run his hand in soothing patterns across Stiles' back, fingertips soft but certain as they loop and stroke, pausing here and there to dig into stress-tight muscles. Stiles presses in a little tighter, and Derek makes a noise that is almost a croon, nuzzling his face into the velvety brush of Stiles' hair, which has to be damp with the clammy sweat that sticks his skin to his clothes, and rank with fear and adrenaline, but Derek doesn't seem to mind.

When they've both relaxed, when their breathing is slow and their bodies quiescent, Derek says, "I want to try something with you."

Stiles twitches, to let him know that he's listening. His tears have stopped, but his face is tacky with leftover salt and snot. (He unabashedly rubs his cheek against Derek's shirt, to clean it off a

little.) Derek's hand wraps around the back of his skull like a cap; and under Stiles' ear, Derek's heartbeat is as loud and steady as a metronome. "I have rope in my bag, and I think you'd do well with shibari, just to bind you up, hold you close." He tips Stiles' head, so that they're forced to make eye contact. "I believe it will make you feel safe."

Stiles blinks in thought, and Derek hurries forward, "It won't be sexual. I want to tie you up and let you sleep. Just to protect you until morning. Would you be alright with that, Stiles?"

His cadence is formal, as is his presentation, and Stiles recognizes that he's being approached ritually about a scene. He thinks about the comfort he derived from the blanket burrito, and the crossed strips of the shred of t-shirt around his forearm. Fuck yes, he wants that again. Because maybe if Derek ties him up tight enough, he won't be able to think, and he's trying very, *very* hard not to think about what he was just dreaming. (Elephants. No: *Don't think of elephants.*)

He bobs his head.

Derek nods back at him, serious and pleased. He shifts Stiles fully to one side and scarcely stands up enough to snag his duffel off the desk before he sits back down. He pulls out a neatly coiled skein of dark rope, and also a small box.

"I was going to give this to you this weekend," he says, pulling Stiles under his arm once again. "And discuss it with your father, first. But I think that maybe you need it now."

Stiles perks up a little. The box is three inches square, like a jeweler's bracelet box, and he's curious about what's in it. Derek hands it over, and Stiles gives him a little smile before lifting the lid. For a moment he stares at it, confused, because it doesn't immediately register as any particular archetype. He scoops the object out, a circle of dark velvet, perhaps an inch wide and deeply rucked and gently padded. If it has a color, it's rendered indeterminate by the late hour and the nightlight. A stylistic triskelion hangs from the front, matching the tattoo on Derek's back.

It's a collar. Derek has just offered him a collar.

Stiles holds his breath and clenches his teeth and fights the hot stinging in his sinuses that means he's about to succumb to tears. (Again.) He looks up at Derek, lifting the collar from the box and pressing it to his mouth, perhaps for a kiss, he doesn't even know. The velvet is sensuously soft against his lips.

Derek beams like a ray of sunshine, pulls him forward to lightly kiss his forehead, wraps his fingers around Stiles' where they hold the collar. "Will you wear my collar, Stiles Stilinski?"

Stiles nods and smiles and *maybe* a tear or two escapes and tracks down his face, but there is no one here who would ever tell.

Derek spans his ten fingers inside the collar lifting it off Stiles' hand and then pulling it wide. "It's elastic," he explains quietly. "No buckle, no lock, no lead. I didn't think you'd want that right now. It's. Something you can take off whenever you feel you need to. Something that will shift with you no matter your form." Derek stops to take a deep breath, and even in the dim light his eyes glitter: his focus is intense. "It will *never* hurt you. And neither will I."

Fucking hell, what did Stiles ever do to deserve this man? He's a fucking dream. Stiles laughs a little, and it almost makes a sound, and then he bumps his head under Derek's jaw, an unconscious, animal, submissive move. He's illuminated. Impatient. *Get on with it, then!*

The velvet slips over his forehead as Derek guides it, and settles at the narrowest point of his neck, triskelion dangling just inside the hollow of his throat. Derek's fingers linger on the thin skin to either side of the band, fussing a little with the placement, stroking along the grain of the fabric when it's settled to his satisfaction.

"It looks beautiful on you." Derek leans back and then pulls Stiles up to turn him towards his mirror, across the room. The nightlight leeches the color from the room, but Stiles can see well enough to appreciate the line the collar cuts on his throat. It's simple and elegant and soft as kisses, and the band bisecting his neck makes it look slim and aristocratic instead of gawky and disproportioned. When he swallows, he can feel his Adam's apple brush against the gentle restriction. He lifts his hands to touch, and goosebumps run over his skin at the delicious sensation of it. *His collar.*

Derek quirks a small smile and turns him around to drop a kiss on his lips.

Which, hello, this calls for more than a simple kiss, two in the morning notwithstanding. Stiles pushes forward, clumsy with eagerness and inexperience. Derek kneels up on the bed next to him, inches higher, and Stiles revels in the feeling of his upstretched neck, head dropped back, jaw slackened, velvet softly constraining. He whimpers, a soft sound, high in his throat, and Derek groans in response, holds his head with both hands, lifts him that tiny bit further to where his weight feels supported and controlled by Derek, strokes open his mouth, and proceeds to *own* him, curling over his body.

All Stiles can do is hold on, grip tight around each thick wrist, and revel in the feeling of possession.

The sheer authority of Derek's posture is enough to render Stiles loose, perhaps sliding a step beyond pliant into straight-up jelly. Derek's lips evoke the muscularity of the rest of him: mobile and assertive, they press and suck and push, wrap around Stiles' like his only job is to receive, to be soft and malleable, to provide a tender counterpoint to Derek's foray. Derek's tongue is audacious when it snakes into Stiles' mouth, firm and invasive and distracting and intoxicating, to the point where Stiles forgets to breathe and this, yes, *this* is what Stiles wants, this is what comes inherent in his collar, and it's more than he'd ever dreamed.

Derek is obviously thinking about the collar as well, and as he dominates Stiles' mouth, he slowly works his hands around Stiles' throat, cupping him completely, warm flesh heating his neck and emphasizing the slightly cooler, slightly softer band of the collar, and everything is pressing in, so certain, and it's clear that what Stiles should do is yield, and that's never been easier, never.

They kiss forever, Stiles thinks. He isn't sure, because he's been floating, just taking it, letting it happen, mostly because he *trusts* Derek: a kiss is such a small thing after all the shit they've gone through. And it feels good, *so good*. His blood runs hot, not fizzing, but drugging in his veins, slow and voluptuous and so heavy he might fall right through the mattress. Stiles is purring, which is funny, because his mouth is full of tongue, and he's making little moaning sounds, and the purrs happen independent of that, a steady rasp, underlying his little gasps and groans. Derek rumbles back at him, more of a growl, and his hands are everywhere, lowering Stiles in the bed until, when he blinks his eyes open once again, Derek's face is framed against the backdrop of the ceiling.

Derek slips one hand under Stiles' head, cradling his entire skull, and with the other he fingers the triskele charm on the collar. When Stiles shivers and pouts in complaint because his lips appear to have been abandoned, Derek slowly withdraws, dropping lingering parting kisses as he pulls away.

Stiles' hands slide down from where they'd been gripping Derek's neck, his powerful shoulders, until they again wrap around his wrists, propping him up to either side of Stiles.

Derek blinks slowly. He looks stoned, heavy lidded and hazy. His pupils are so large that his iris has vanished, and his eyelashes cast obscene shadows across his cheeks. He runs his thumb across Stiles' bottom lip. "Baby –" but he doesn't finish the thought, just drops his head to nose at the corner of Stiles' jaw, and Stiles turns his head, insistent, chasing after another kiss, which Derek gives him, and then another and another, but each is shorter than the last, which is frustrating, and Derek finally sits fully upright, keeping a hand on Stiles' chest to ensure that he doesn't follow.

"We should stop," Derek finally murmurs. His breaths are gratifyingly shallow. "It's a school night, and you'll have to get up in four hours."

Stiles wrinkles his nose to show his utter disdain for keeping school hours, and Derek's face twitches into a mask of amusement minus the actual smile. He toys with the velvet, touches a few spots under Stiles' ear that Stiles knows are moles.

"Are you calm enough to sleep peacefully? Or would you still like to try the shibari?"

Stiles looks over to where Derek's placed his rope and nods at it. *Yeah, of course, man, yeah, let's do that thing!* Not that he's preoccupied with the dream anymore, no, Derek did a very good job of distracting him. But that doesn't mean it'll last forever. And besides, Stiles is very, *very* intrigued. He'd sacrifice more than just a few hours' sleep for the opportunity for Derek to wrap him tight in rope.

"Okay." Derek gets his rope and unties it from itself, shaking it out into two long tails that shift and slither in the dim light like snakes. The earthy smell of hemp wafts gently into the still air. "I'm going to do a reverse harness on you: bind your hands at your chest instead of your back, so you can sleep without hurting yourself. Nothing too fancy, not tonight," and Stiles body freezes for a moment in delight at the prospect of Derek doing something *fancy*, of him taking an hour or even more to meticulously wind him up in the embrace of his rope, *unf*.

His mouth is hanging open again, he can feel it. Stiles Stilinski, folks, sex personified. Sigh. (He shuts his mouth and swallows the flash of embarrassment, but it can't be sustained against the adventure of a new collar, against Derek's calculating assessment of his body, against the sound of fibers catching against Derek's palm as he manipulates the hemp.)

Derek flicks the rope outward to shake it free, finds the middle section where it's doubled over. Clasping it loosely in his hand, he traces across Stiles' chest with his forefinger, the slight weight of rope trailing behind his touch. "Have you been bound before, Stiles?"

Stiles can feel his breaths growing shorter, more stuttering, although it's out of anticipation rather than fear. He shakes his head *No*.

"Okay. It's alright. I studied this when I lived in New York, so I know what I'm doing."

(*Ohmygod, he studied it???* Stiles probably just died and went to heaven. There's no other explanation.)

Derek taps his finger against a rib to draw Stiles' attention back to his hand, as if it had ever left, heh. "For your comfort and safety, because you sleep on your back, I'll keep the knots in front,

your hands in front. Nothing will be too tight, since the ropes will be on until morning. Clothes stay on," he admonishes when Stiles moves to strip off his shirt. Stiles pouts.

Derek smirks. "Not sexual," he says again. "Later, we can do that. But not tonight." He moves to lift each of Stiles' wrists, and Stiles tries to help him, trying to anticipate his moves, preparing to cross them over his chest, and Derek shakes his head: "No, don't. Just let me move you. Just relax. Stay limp."

Stiles wrinkles his nose again, because asking him to do that makes it feel impossible, makes him feel nothing so much as wooden and resistant. Derek lifts each arm and folds it low on Stiles' chest, keeping the lines of his forearms nicely parallel to each other and perpendicular to the length of his body. His fingers are straightened and draped against what he thinks of as his 'book-carrying muscle', the tips curling over each elbow. Derek carefully pulls his thumbs out from where he's helpfully tucked them, making a soft disapproving sound, and lays them straight along with his fingers. "Let me," he admonishes.

So Stiles sighs and tries to make like a noodle. He considers the velvet embrace around his neck, the air cooling the damp that Derek left behind on his lips. He mulls over the rope trailing across his chest and a different rope that he holds in his hand at school when Derek stalks by his side in wolf form. He can do this. He can relax.

He lets out a long breath, and Derek's eyes flash crimson in approval. "Good boy," he says, voice slightly thicker and deeper. "I knew you could do this for me, Stiles."

He slides his entire forearm under Stiles, from the bottom of his shoulder blade up to his skull and lifts him slightly off the bed before Stiles figures out what's going on, before he can even tense up his abdominals to help. "Very nice," Derek whispers as the rope is passed under him from one side of his body to the other. "I like to feel your trust in the weight you give over, baby boy. Look how gorgeous you are when you're relaxed." Stiles is laid back on the mattress without a hitch. Derek's hands are knowledgeable and firm as he twists the rope into the first knot. "I'll cross here, and here, and here," he says, drawing invisible lines across Stiles' chest and down his belly. "It will wrap around your wrists and arms here, and I'll continue across your waist and use a second rope to bind your legs from hip to ankle."

He's as good as his word.

Stiles is a little stiff at first. And the thought of this beautiful and intricate ropework going over his old sleep shirt (which, printed with a dejected Storm Trooper mourning that *I had friends on that Death Star*, makes him seem too young and foolish for such a serious scene). But Derek doesn't seem to judge. He pleats the worn shirt carefully in all the places where the rope will pull tight, running his finger through the space beforehand, and it is clear that his concern is all for Stiles and his comfort and benefit.

Gradually, Stiles sheds his stiffness, losing himself in the haze that comes from giving himself over to his Dom. Derek's hands seem to grow in size and magnitude, so that when his palm is firm on Stiles' spine, his fingers spread to support his weight, Stiles feels as though it encompasses the entire real estate of his back. Derek moves to straddle Stiles' thighs, centering himself to Stiles as he wraps the rope, bending close enough that Stiles can feel the stirring of the air with each of his breaths.

Derek keeps their groins from contact, disappointingly, adhering to his declaration that this is nonsexual. Although, Stiles notes fuzzily, he never claimed the experience would be nonsensual,

and it certainly isn't. His cock swells, mildly insistent, but the heated, turgid feeling diffuses across his skin, through his bones, luscious to experience, but not urgent.

Shhhh, Derek hushes, noticing his arousal. Relax. Give yourself to me for now. That's right. So good. You're so beautiful. So responsive. So soft under my hands. So gorgeous in my rope.

Stiles' eyes nearly roll back in his head at the intoxicating flow of approval. The sensations on his skin are heightened, roughened with touch, singing through his nerves, tangled with the praise and promises that Derek pours over him. *Shhhh.* "Someday, I'll take your clothes off, piece by piece, and then redress you in nothing but rope and knots. You're body will be exquisite, through the grid of my ropes. Ethereal."

The moment is intense, borne through emotion and the metaphysical connection of their bond into something epiphanous, a blending of their shadows into something greater than the sum of its parts.

The more Derek grows in Stiles' mind - the more he vines through every corner of Stiles' consciousness, becoming bigger and more solid and more demandingly *present* - the more Stiles relinquishes his own control, body turning liquid, boneless, draping like a ribbon made of trust over Derek's gentle manipulations. Each labyrinthine knot pulls Stiles down a bit more, mesmerized by the time and the focus, the intensity that Derek lasers at him, like Stiles is the only thing in the world, and that it is important that he be wrapped perfectly, and with all due ceremony.

Derek's adulation dots the space between them like stars, a slow stream of praise and encouragement as he works, so that the words become woven into the twists and knots of the rope. *Beautiful. Good. Strong. Necessary. Mate. Mine.*

It just. Unf. It's addictive and exhilarating. Stiles eyes grow heavy, but he cannot tear them away from Derek's face, cut sharply into planes by the shadows cast by the light: the highlighted jut of cheekbone and jaw; the deep black velvet of stubble, smoothly painted; the startling prominence of thick eyebrows (which are surrogates for his voice, when that trails off. They speak of concentration, of care, of adoration, even, through their downward slant, the shadow of a wrinkle at the inner corner of each). Derek's eyes glow red, points of light that Stiles only and ever can associate with safety and comfort, with rescue and salvation, with surcease of pain, a visual salve.

When Derek picks up the second rope, to start on on his legs, Stiles is faintly aware of how far he's dropping, how his heart beats a languid marker, how his breathing has become deep and slow, as if his body is preparing for hibernation, a deep-space stasis. His throat vibrates with a soft purr; and although it is involuntary, it makes Stiles happy, that he has such a method at his disposal to demonstrate to his Dom that he's content, that Derek's efforts to surround him, please him, engulf him are successful, and appreciated.

And Derek's heart beats back, in the same languorous rhythm, eyes flickering from the work of deft fingers to Stiles' face again and again. A hand like a raft lifts him, ass off the bed, rope passed underneath, twined around his hips, his thighs, worked with precision through knotted spaces and pulled inexorably tighter, closing Stiles in, shrinking him down.

You are safe, the ropes whisper.

You are held.

You are freed from your thoughts and your fears.

You are protected from the world by this barrier.

Sensuously, lazily, he twists, stretches, tests the limits of the binding. Derek's hands stay warm on his ankles, tucking in the ends of the rope, rubbing up Stiles' legs, bumping gently over each horizontal pass, checking the strength and symmetry of each knot, slipping a firm finger between twisted hemp and thin cotton sleep pants to be sure Stiles is balanced precisely at the intersection of comfort and tension.

Drift. You are relieved of doubt, the bindings promise when he shifts within their clasp, *because there is no choice or movement you can make.*

The loops of rope form an impenetrable tracery, stifling his thoughts, his wide-ranging emotions, until everything is soft and dark and warm, until his whole world is Derek, his Dom, stroking his outside with shaping hands, vast and imponderable. These touches are echoed on the inside as well – with the melting warmth of the bond between them, twining through every breath, curling up in his chest as if determined to wrap around each rib, each organ, as solidly as the rope does on his outside.

Stiles purrs when Derek has arranged him to his satisfaction, leans down, sucks gently under his jaw, behind his ear, laving at the scent glands there. Derek smells like himself, but stronger, here in this intimate darkness. Enmeshed with the earthy odor of the rope, Derek's scent evokes the essence of the forest, the abandon of wild things, the subtle suggestion of growth and green stuff, power and shelter. Mouth dropped slightly open, Stiles breathes in the way his own smell is sewn into the fabric of this dark and quiet scene: submission and pleasure, pliancy and trust. His natural notes of ginger and lime are brightened with cucumber relief, piquant satisfaction and sweet satiation.

There is a light touch, a fingertip, tracing the edge of the collar, and then Derek kisses him gently. Stiles is so far down that he forgets to respond, which Derek seems to like, if the way he rubs his own lips across Stiles', nipping carefully before drawing away, is any indication.

“*Sleep*,” Derek orders, and the deep pull of Dom voice feels so good to Stiles, like a balmy touch over his every bit of sensory self. “I will watch over you. *Sleep*.”



End Part 3

Chapter End Notes

[Here is the picture on Pillowfort](#), if you feel like you need a copy over there. ;P

PART FOUR The New Normal

Chapter Notes

Happy (belated) Summer Solstice to you all. I'm sorry this is late: I just had five days without internet. *FIVE DAYS!*

It was grievous. Seriously. It nearly destroyed my entire family. I know you can all feel my pain.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



Part 4: A Long and Dangerous Path Towards Closure

The next week passes slowly, a ponderous unspooling of school, therapy, Stiles' house and Derek's loft. Stiles tries to re-acclimate to school and routine, with very limited success. However, it *is* nice to not eat alone all the time. His new lunch group, surprisingly, turns out to be the highlight of each day, although he remains helplessly, stubbornly, mute. The new girl, Cecily, doesn't ever comment on how bizarre it is that the other kids seem to talk to Stiles' service dog as often as they talk to each other, so maybe she hasn't noticed. Or maybe she's just so glad they don't mention *her* differences, that she won't draw attention to theirs.

Derek's steady guard and reliable strength pressed against his hip is a lifeline he's nowhere near being able to survive without, and he continually shoves down looming panic over the day when Derek will assume he's fulfilled his Alpha-duty and moves on. He still feels the stares of his schoolmates – they cling to his skin like sewage, so that he is constantly suppressing the need to twitch. His fox-enhanced senses are no gift in this environment, where he can hear lewd and cruel comments, smell lust or disdain, sense violence and hatred. Derek does his best to be a rock for

Stiles, but he's not so emotionless that his instinctive reactions of fury, defensiveness or protective aggression don't seep through the bond, throwing Stiles further off kilter.

At least no one touches him anymore... not like they did before he was kidnapped. There is no pushing and shoving, no knocking him down to his knees, no one forcefully bending him over to grope (or kick) his ass. Derek's watchful presence, his low growls and eyes that flash red too fleetingly to be consciously registered, thankfully keeps the worst of his bullies away. But that doesn't mean they can't talk, can't be snide and cruel, can't make him the butt of jokes, or spit at him in the locker rooms, safely out of reach of Derek's snapping jaws.

His new collar has been noted, of course. (Starting with his dad, that first morning, and Stiles had unapologetically hidden in the shower with his phone blaring music, so as not to acknowledge the conversation he and Derek would be having. Whatever was said was sufficient, because his dad just gave him a super-long, Stilinski-Special hug before sending them off to school, smelling cinnamon-and-salt with a contradictory blend of sorrow and pride.)

At school, however, Stiles doesn't respond to the endless, intrusive questions and jabs about being collared, and whenever Derek's betas are nearby, they close around him like an armed guard. (Which they kind of are, heh – armed with teeth and claws and an animalistic, near feral, lack of inhibitions.) Derek's menacing aura alone is generally enough to keep him in a protected bubble.

Stiles toys compulsively with the triskelion charm to quell his nerves. He keeps his eyes down, lets Derek pick his path through hundreds of pairs of shuffling feet, reeking bodies, sharp-cornered books and elbows. Scott stays nearby, as much as he can since they don't share many classes (bless his persistently academically bewildered little heart). Allison is soft and sympathetic at the fringes, subtly insinuating herself between Stiles and the spewing of filth from Jackson, Greenburg, Bree and Makenzie, and Jackson's other, brutish, hangers-on.

Even Lydia seems to slowly awaken to what is happening to Stiles, appearing uncomfortably enlightened as to what's been happening to him as a matter of course since he presented and showed up to school – proud in his new collar – on that first day back in sixth grade when his whole life had changed. (It's changed again, now, and Stiles thinks that post-kidnapping is even worse than post-presentation.)

Today, leaving Lit and headed for AP History, Stiles starts to feel unaccountably agitated. No one's bothering him at the moment, he's just surrounded by an indifferent jam of shoulders and the boisterous swell of conversation typical of class changes. His heart speeds up, and sweat appears from nowhere, itchy and glutinous in his hair and slippery under his arms to dart in shivery trails down his ribs until it hits his waistband. Something. Something is *panicking* him, and whatever it is hasn't reached his conscious brain, yet.

It's at this moment, when he's distracted and vulnerable, that there is a rapid approach of footsteps behind him, and he is barraged by a sudden chorus of "*Down!*" from at least four different voices. Stiles trips over Derek, who he's instinctively jerked closer, and drops, unthinking, to his knees. There's laughter all around him, but it's dull, removed, because his brain suddenly notes that he can smell aconite and gun oil; the perfume that always presaged Laxmi, smokey and dark; the caustic sting of Tabasco that he associates with the wolfsbane gas.

He makes a hurt little sound, and his hand spasms around Derek's lead, nearly strangling the wolf in his fear. Derek's head whips up and he whirls to growl fiercely at the Doms behind them. Stiles doesn't know if Derek is smelling the same thing Stiles is or if he's simply responding to the

Domming assault from the kids behind him. He can recognize Jackson and Greenburg and Matt by smell alone, and wonders who had the brilliant idea to co-Dom him. He trembles on the floor, pinioned under the invisible hands holding him down; and Derek's furious snarl sends him back into that nightmare basement, naked and terrified and bleeding, with Rudy and Gunner chanting at him and Derek helpless in his chains.

Something slams to the floor next to him, far enough away to be out of Derek's reach, and the sound is sharp and discrete, like a gunshot. The part of his brain that's not drowning in a flashback notes that it's a stack of textbooks, and that Jackson is demanding that he pick them up and carry them around, but although his eyes are open, all he can see is a red-splattered concrete floor and the pointed tips of cowboy boots.

From a long distance, he hears Lydia, furiously hissing, "Jackson, you are such an *asshole*, you *all* need to fucking *back off*," and something more, but Derek surges forward, and Stiles tangles his fingers in long fur as tightly as he can, and whimpers *Derek*, into the wolf's neck, where no one can see, and he's pretty sure that if Derek actually moved that he'd have to break Stiles' arms off to get him to let go, and Stiles is actually dragged a few inches along the floor before Derek stops his enraged lunge. The scent of Derek's frustration and ferocity mingle with Lydia's perfume and Jackson's pomade and the faintest waft of *hunter*, and all these things make Stiles feel like a mote in a drain, spinning and spinning as he's sucked down into murky water.

The sound of Lydia haranguing Jackson and his cohorts fades away, and Derek takes Stiles wrist between his teeth, urging him upright and hauling him through the slowly thinning crowd of gawkers. Stiles stumbles behind him, gasping and nauseous and dizzy with it, veering close to Derek's side for comfort, to the extent that Derek stumbles and has to push back just to keep them moving in a straight line. Somehow, there's no adult around, no friendly pack member, only the edacious stares of other students, who linger for a full serving of schadenfreude, reveling in his humiliation and drama.

Derek crowds him into the nearest bathroom now that students in the halls have thinned to a trickle, and the second bell rings, a raucous shriek, muffled as the door closes behind them. Derek swings his black-ruffed head from side to side, checking the room for occupants, and then gives a short bark, gnawing at the strap of his vest. Hands shaking, Stiles thunks painfully to his knees, scrabbling to unbuckle him, and Derek immediately shifts. The pop and grind of his body going through the change is comforting to Stiles, now, instead of disturbing, and he pitches face-first into Derek's warm, naked shoulder as soon as the transition is complete.

"Alright," Derek says, wrapping one arm around Stiles' waist and then pulling them both to standing. He twists the lock in the door, leaving them safely isolated on the inside. "Hey, hey. C'mere, baby. You're okay."

But Stiles really isn't. He can feel the icy surface of his skin, the tingling at his extremities, the sensation of growing blind even with his eyes wide open. He gasps for breath, and automatically reaches to tear at the stiff leather collar. Derek's hand closes around his own, runs his finger gently between skin and velvet, guiding Stiles to do the same.

"You can breathe," he says. "There's nothing here to choke you, see? Test it..."

Stiles does, pulling the collar away from his neck, velvet, not leather. And it moves easily under his crooked finger, cooler air flowing into the vacuum to emphasize the nakedness of his skin, the lack of cruel stricture.

"Look at me," Derek croons. "Look at me, Stiles," and there's something so safe about that, the tone he uses and the words that he says. It recalls the comfort of Derek's hands, his touch and voice and warmly glowing eyes in the terrifying darkness of that awful basement room.

Stiles hands wrap convulsively around Derek's ribs, slide on smooth skin until he can anchor his fingers in the groove of his spine, clutch him closer, press them together chest to chest, push his face into the firm muscle of Derek's shoulder, gasping in noisy, vocalized attempts to get oxygen.

But Derek doesn't let him hide; lifts his head with a hand on each side of his face, holds him there, nose to nose with Derek, and flashes his eyes red. Stiles blinks, and knows at this point what it feels like when his own eyes flash back. Sloe. Glinting. The rest of the world, the stinking bathroom, the clinging remnants of hunter and wolfsbane and weapons, the jeering classmates, all of it is subsumed in Derek's face, in his crimson gaze and the dominating force of his will. Warmth expanding in his chest denotes their bond, through which Derek is clearly pushing *calm* and *safety*.

"Breathe."

Stiles claws his hands, digging his nails into Derek's spine, pulling himself closer, trying to hide himself in Derek's body. Derek inhales, slowly and deliberately, and cool air rushes past Stiles' cheeks as Derek pulls it in. He tries to breathe too, but his lungs are calcified, his throat has closed up, and panic bubbles through his blood, he shakes and buzzes with conflicting impulses to collapse and simultaneously stumble wildly around the room, bouncing off the walls and screaming *I can't breathe, I can't breathe*, until someone comes to help him, because he's *dying*, he's dying (even though he *knows* that he isn't, that it's a symptom of a panic attack, but that doesn't make the morbid tsunami of terror abate.)

But Derek is here. His exhale is warm and deliberate, blown right into Stiles' own mouth from two inches away. "*Breathe out. Stay slow. Follow me, baby.*" The hands that clamp around his head will let him do nothing but focus, so Stiles tries, huffing out short little gasps, as steady as he can manage, because he's gonna die, he's *gonna die*, and how can Derek be so calm?

"Just like that, baby boy," Derek murmurs. "Breathe in again, slow it down," and a thumb strokes his cheek, as if coaxing him to pull in air. Derek's rising chest brushes against his own, and Stiles tries to hone in on these points of contact, tries to follow Derek, like he asked. Derek flashes his eyes again, and that and the dominance of his pose makes Stiles settle, just enough to frantically pull in another breath, only half as long as Derek's, but it earns him smiling eyes, and fingers that briefly stroke circles at his temples, and warm breath blown gently at his chin, his mouth and his nose. "So good," Derek says. "You're trying so hard, my sweet thing, and I can't tell you how proud that makes me. Try again. Breathe for me."

Stiles clings, and breathes, and after forever his panic dies down, the frenetic buzz that shorts out everything in his brain recedes.

"You're being so good for me, Stiles," Derek says into his ear, gruff. He cards through Stiles' hair before tipping his head up to receive Derek's kiss. It's firm, and approving. Derek's lips move against his own in short bursts before he pulls away, letting Stiles catch his breath. He strokes down Stiles' neck, across his shoulders, down his arms and around his back, scooping the straps of his backpack down his arms and letting it drop to the floor.

"You're so brave," Derek murmurs, hands strong and warm and holding him so he doesn't burst out of his skin. "So strong."

For the moment, Stiles is able to let the knowledge that the hunters have *been in his school* slip away, and instead leans into his Dom, growing boneless and warm. He can smell Derek's skin, so sleek and salty under his chin as he's embraced, and Stiles lets his own hands do some exploring, slowly fingering the furrow of Derek's back until it spills out into the rounded territory of his ass, hard muscle shaping it like steel. Naked steel. Because Derek is naked. Naked in the boys' bathroom, *what is his life?*

Derek huffs a laugh before Stiles can really cop a good feel, and slips his own fingers into Stiles' back pocket. For a moment, the sub thinks it's about to be sexy times, and he gladly rubs himself on Derek's everything, because, yeah, gross school bathroom can't possibly compete with hot-assed (literally, ha!) Alpha werewolf, naked and softly growling, muscles bulging with the need to protect *him*, lips spilling with warm words of praise and the alluring scent of rising arousal.

Instead of groping Stiles' behind, regrettfully, Derek scoops out his phone, holds it out to Stiles so he can input the passcode, which he does with a pout, and then dials his father.

"*Stiles?*"

"No, sir, this is Derek."

"Is everything alright? Did something happen to Stiles?" John's voice rises, and Stiles, who really doesn't even need to strain to hear the conversation, can catch the sound of his dad's heartbeat, jumping into overdrive. Derek's eyes flick up, and he smirks a little, lifting his free hand to stroke over Stiles' absurdly enormous fox ears, which have sprung unbidden on his head, dammit, he really needs to learn to control that.

Don't tell, he mouths at Derek, because, fuck, Dad does *not* need to know the kind of shit that goes down at school, and Stiles has Derek, now, and next time, he won't hold Derek back, and Jackson will get torn to shreds, and Stiles will be *glad*.

"Stiles is fine. But we just caught scent of both Laxmi and Baron outside the school office. They've left already, the sillage was at least half an hour old. I don't want to leave Stiles, but I think you should contact Chris, look around, see if you can find them."

Stiles can hear the sound of his father's big old office chair rolling back on the wooden floor, hears papers shuffle and the soft windy sound of his canvas jacket being thrown on, the jangle of his keys. "I'll be there in a few minutes. You *keep my son safe*, okay, and I'll contact you later."

"Of course, sir," Derek says respectfully.

With infinite regret, Stiles buckles the vest back onto Derek's furry body, and then continues with his day. School seems pointless, as Stiles has no *idea* what his teachers are talking about. He thinks he smells the hunters everywhere, now – olfactory hallucinations, probably – and spends most of his energy bracing himself not to jump, not to shiver or show his fear. Derek sticks to him like a burr, and Stiles occasionally wonders if Derek has to rein his own self in in order to stay so calm for Stiles, because Stiles is monitoring his heartbeat so closely that he has to keep running his hand over his hair to be sure he hasn't accidentally sprouted fox ears again.

The betas cluster around him at lunch, easily picking up on his distress. When Erica asks him what happened, he fumbles with his notepad before scribbling, ***Thought we smelled the hunters.*** Erica looks around and so obviously scents the air that Stiles actually kicks her under the table. (And you know it's bad when *Stiles* is the person reminding folks to be subtle!) The note is passed to Boyd and Isaac, who also scent, although with less fanfare. Cecily isn't here today, which makes their werewolfy behavior slightly less incriminating. (The rest of the school has learned to leave at least a three-seat berth around Stiles' new, Derek-patrolled lunch space.)

"Huh," Boyd breathes, as if he can smell it, too, which is impossible, since the scent has long since faded. But there is nothing to be done, so they just eat and carry on with the day.

Stiles' phone buzzes with a text a couple of hours later. "Haven't found anything, have to go back to work. Chris still patrolling. Keep me posted."

Scott is close on his heels when the final bell rings, and they stand for a while in the parking lot.
"You okay, man? Your, uh, posse was acting kind of weird today."

Sometimes Scott is surprisingly perceptive. Stiles shrugs, and pulls out the crumpled note from lunch, passing it over. Scott frowns as he smooths it out. "Duuude," he says slowly. "Really?"

Stiles nods and points to Derek, who also gives a little nod. Yes, they're sure.

Scott fiddles with the strap of his backpack for a minute before turning and suddenly engulfing Stiles in a giant bear hug, full-frontal, solid contact, no shame.

Stiles grins and melts into it, struck with the impulse to cry. Scott has been his best friend since he can remember, and *this is why*. The unconditional love and support and empathy. Scott may get distracted sometimes, may accidentally deliver hurt, but it's *never* deliberate, and he *always* feels bad afterward, and it's so clear that there's no friend he loves better or more truly than Stiles.

Stiles buries his face in his friend's neck, coating his cheek in Scott's distinctive scent: a chemical layer of Axe which had made Stiles sneeze even *before* he became a fox, the smell of his sweat, which had always made Stiles think of pickles (not a bad thing, because Stiles may or may not have a secret penchant for drinking pickle juice, alright?), the faint odor of his house, which to Stiles has always smelled a little like burlap and furniture from the 80s.

Stiles wraps his arms around his friend, working one under his backpack and the other weaved around a bicep that had grown in the last year due to lacrosse. Scott hugs him back, one hand carefully around the back of his head (Scott has pretty considerately and quickly figured out that no one can touch Stiles' neck anymore but Derek. He was a little jealous at first, but it was obviously more important to him to make Stiles comfortable than to jostle with Derek for preeminence over different parts of Stiles' body. In this case, his distraction with Allison is a benefit.) Scott's other arm grips below the book bag, just along the top of Stiles' ass. Stiles grins into his friend's neck when he hears Derek huff, annoyed. He knows that Derek is comfortable with the fact that Scott isn't a threat and his pique is just for show.

Scott backs away after a minute and aims a friendly cuff at Stiles shoulder. "Come on, man. Let's blow this popsicle stand and go somewhere those assholes can't get to." Stiles rolls his eyes, but fishes out his keys (so happy to *finally* have his Jeep back, and be allowed to drive it). He lets Derek leap fluidly into the back before sliding behind the wheel, and Scott settles into the passenger seat as he's done a thousand times before.

It feels so good to know that he's got a 'posse', as Scott puts it. He's in a time of need, a time of crisis, and there are people gathered around him who only want to help, and that's a new thing under the sun for Stiles. Even before he presented, he was always a little outcast because while his ADHD didn't make him an appealing friend, it certainly made him an appealing target. So for right now, he's just going to bask in that: the new normal.

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun dun!!! Why were the hunters in the school? Or did Stiles just imagine it? Stay tuned...

In spite of being internet-less, I could still go up by my mailbox and get enough cell signal to download some stories. Just this morning I read [Red Witch](#) by [rootbeer](#), which totally scratched my itch for captive Sterek. Also in that vein is [Hunger](#) by [DiscontentedWinter](#), which was rec'd to me a few weeks ago, and ungh, just, that one's a gut-wrencher. Pushed all my buttons. (Which are probably your buttons as well, since you're reading this.)

***The next chapter will be posted on the normal schedule, so I'll see y'all again on the 3rd.

Missing

Chapter Notes

I switch POV in the middle of the chapter, y'all. I know that's a terrible breach of writerly etiquette, but I figured you'd enjoy the longer chapter, regardless.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next morning, Stiles idles the Jeep in front of Scott's house, huffing and rolling his eyes. He's already honked twice, which he feels uncomfortable about, since it's not even eight in the morning and still dark outside. Melissa's little Toyota isn't there, which means she's doing an overnight shift, and Scott's phone clearly isn't charged, the doofus, since it goes straight to voicemail. Stiles leans his head back for a moment, not feeling particularly motivated to go knock on the door.

Derek's snout rests heavily on his shoulder, and Stiles lazily scratches behind his ears. He's streaming a podcast about the history of salt, which is actually pretty fascinating, and he's not inclined to interrupt it.

It had taken him a long while to settle down yesterday, single-mindedly playing video games and applying himself to his homework while Derek read a book nearby and... *don't think of elephants, don't think of elephants*. It had worked well enough (Stiles likes to consider himself a master of repression), and he really doesn't want to do anything that might rock his gently rolling little boat.

Stiles gives it another five minutes before he finally hauls himself out of the car. It's particularly biting today, almost as cold as it was up in the mountains, and he immediately tenses, both against the weather and the memory. (It's been three weeks now, and he should be over it.) He rings the doorbell, bangs on the door a few times, and then finally gets back in the Jeep, frozen and seething, because, rude, much, Scott? The house is silent, no heartbeat, and Stiles is pissed that Scott already left, because they'd *discussed it yesterday*, dammit, and Scott definitely wanted Stiles to come pick him up for school.

Stiles braces himself for school. He'd hoped he could walk in with Scott at his back, but Derek is sufficient, of course. It doesn't stop Stiles from being so tense that his shoulders are up around his ears, and his eyes dart around, hypervigilant, ready for the hunters, or Jackson and his squad, to leap out at him. It's exhausting, and he's gonna give Scott a piece of his mind for blowing him off when they see each other second period.

But second period comes and goes, with no sign of Scott. Stiles is puzzled, because if Scott plays hooky, it's usually at Stiles' instigation, which obviously didn't happen this time. Lunch makes him edgy and jumpy. He keeps thinking he smells the hunters, but it's so faint that it's more a triggered memory than a fact. He's rudely abrupt with Cecily and the betas (yep, it's possible, even without speaking, and Stiles does it), and Derek sticks close, nose practically in his ear, responding to his agitation.

Sixth period, he pulls Allison aside before class and, after clearing his throat and looking around, manages to croak, "Scott?"

Allison jumps at the sound of his voice, which she'd never heard before, Stiles realizes.

"Oh! Oh, my god, Stiles, you're speaking!"

Grrr, no, *no*, this isn't what Stiles wants: grabbing the attention of everyone in the hallway, making a big deal about his voice, just, no. He growls, animal nature shining through, and knows his eyes are flashing black, is glad that his back is to the streaming hallway. He shakes her elbow and then shakes his head, eyebrows furrowing. He can feel Derek pushing up against his hip, focus divided between Stiles' conversation and the students in the hall.

"Scott?" he asks again, very quiet.

Allison's face tightens in realization. "Okay," she says first, clearly in response to Stiles desire to not have a fuss. "Okay." She reaches up to pet his shoulder, which Stiles tolerates, just waiting.

"You're looking for Scott? I haven't seen him today."

Stiles doesn't move, waiting for more information.

Allison is a smart girl, and recognizes that when he doesn't let her go. "He was maybe going to come over last night to study," she offers. "But he never did. We didn't set it in stone, though, so I didn't call him or anything. I watched a movie with my dad."

Stiles drops his hand from Allison's elbow to Derek's head, twisting his fingers through thick, rough, black fur. Derek is as alert as Stiles feels, and he registers a sudden surge of worried interest through their bond.

Stiles waits the couple hours until school's out on tenterhooks, his increasingly consuming worry over where Scott might be so distracting that he accidentally ignores Jackson's attempts to catch his attention in order to exchange some insults.

Mr. Harris, in Stiles final class of the day, asks for the homework to be turned in, and Jackson mutters (loudly) that he should make Stiles crawl. Mr. Harris hears and actually snickers. This is such an exact reprisal of Stiles' nightmare that he nearly goes straight into a panic attack – his heart slams against the inside of his chest so hard that his shirt vibrates and he feels bruised from the battering pummel of it. Derek is immediately alert, rising to his feet and staring Jackson down. Then, and this is the most awesome thing in the history of the universe and all things in it (including salt), he grabs a corner of Stiles' homework carefully in between all of his many, sharp teeth, and stalks up to Mr. Harris's desk with it. He's tall enough that he could simply drop it on the surface, but instead he, very slowly, lifts himself to place his front paws on the wooden edge, so that he's practically eye to eye with the terrified teacher, whence he gently lays Stiles' assignment on the desk.

Mr. Harris's heart is racing, and a pungent whiff of fear wafts over to where Stiles is sitting, surprised and smug. Derek holds the gaze of the speechless teacher for a moment before dropping back to all fours and ambling back to arrange himself innocently at Stiles' feet.

Stiles doesn't even *try* to disguise his gleeful grin, and gives Derek a happy and approving ruff waggle. He isn't even worried when he hears Jackson hiss that *There's something wrong with that dog.*

Stiles goes straight to the loft from school, as per the new arrangement Dad and Derek had worked out. Isaac and Boyd will both find their own way home after lacrosse practice, but Erica meets them in the parking lot. This time, Derek nudges her towards the back seat, which she whines about, and he plants his furry butt in the passenger seat, playing sentry. (Stiles doesn't dare laugh when he has to brace himself with his front feet as they go around corners, because he just wouldn't insult Derek's four-legged dignity like that. Not today, anyway, when he's feeling so edgy about Scott.)

In the loft, Derek shifts as soon as Stiles has removed the *Service Dog* vest. Erica leers at his nudity, but it's a token effort. Derek stretches, nearly eight feet in all, once his arms are extended. Eight feet of flawless skin, dark hair creating false shadows, blatant power in bulky muscles. Stiles' own leer isn't token in the least, but he does manage to rein in his voyeuristic tendencies. Erica immediately busies herself in the refrigerator (that girl's metabolism is amazing: she easily eats as much as Boyd and Derek.)

Derek, who generally keeps his back turned so as not to potentially trigger Stiles (and maybe Stiles is getting a little tired of that, okay? Maybe he'd be okay with *Derek's* penis...), cricks his neck, *left, right, crack, crack*, and then pops his back. As he wanders upstairs, he grabs the chin up bar en route and does a quick half dozen lifts. At this point, Stiles has learned that such a spontaneous exercise break is less due to narcissism than just to stretch and reawaken muscles that have been caught in a different form for so long. He does the same kind of thing when he shifts from human to wolf: stretching and yawning, doing his odd wheezing grumbling noise, which always makes Stiles giggle internally (he hasn't been brave enough to do it out loud. Yet.)

Erica hands Stiles a Coke and a handful of granola bars. This is something that throws him a bit, the way the betas so absently care for him. Even when teasing him, or gently making fun, they hand him food and drink, make sure he has a comfortable seat, take his plate after dinner. He's not even sure they're aware of it. Certainly he doesn't think Erica is, because if she were, she'd definitely stop. So he puts it down to wolfy instinct, and silently ruminates on the implications for his status in the pack.

Of course, Stiles is competitive, so over the past couple of weeks of exposure to the pack as a whole, he's been aggressively considerate right back at them – helping to cook and put away groceries, tidy the kitchen. Normally, he'd shun tasks such as these, because they have the connotations of an effete sub, an image he's always done his best to shatter. (Except with his dad. Because Dad *needs* caretaking.) But no one in the pack seems to judge. Actually, they seem softly pleased when he does little things for them, which is a reaction that Stiles really hasn't ever had. Well, his dad is grateful, of course. But once they'd worked out their routines post-Mom, neither one had much commented on the other's tasks.

But right now, Stiles is worried, and so he takes the offering with a distracted nod and a hum. He pulls his phone out of his pocket: no texts. After a brief pause, in which he mentally bolsters himself, he selects the option to make a call. The phone doesn't even ring before voicemail kicks in. "Hi, you've reached Scott. So this must be Stiles or Mom or Allison *snorts*. Hi, there! Go on and tell me all the things. I'll call you back in just a minute." Stiles flinches a little at the message. This morning he'd hung up before it had played, and now he feels obscurely sad to know that Scott had changed it since he'd last called. (Which, whoa, feels like such a long time ago, back in the days when there was no Allison, no kidnapping, no cessation of chatter.)

Stiles clears his throat a little, and then says, “Scott.” His voice is just as rusty and broken as it was when he said the same thing to Allison several hours earlier. He perseveres, though, aware of Erica’s gasp from in the kitchen, her sudden, avid eavesdropping. “Scott. I need to know where you are. Call me.” He disconnects, and his hands are clammy, leaving an unappetizing smear across the screen.

Derek vaults down from the loft and takes the few steps over to Stiles, as Erica shrieks “Holy shit, Stiles!” from in the kitchen. Derek’s eyes are nearly silver, colorless, body a silhouette against the cloudy sky and buildings through the window at his back. His eyebrows broadcast his concern, and Stiles steps forward into his arms before Erica, who’s moving rapidly into the main room, can attack him with questions.

That doesn’t stop her, of course. “Stiles!” she squeals. “Fuckity fuck, man. Listen to those dulcet tones. When did you start talking, you sly dog?” She leans in and throws her arms around both of them, and even feeling worried and solemn and slightly intimidated at hearing his own voice, Stiles has to smile. He turns his face away from Derek’s neck to nuzzle the top of Erica’s head, holding back an instinctive sneeze at the intense affront of hairspray and gel.

He purrs, regardless, and Erica pulls away after a minute with a giant smile, rubbing his head for luck as she withdraws. “Look at you,” she says more softly, genuinely. “I didn’t know you could just talk whenever you wanted.”

Stiles shrugs, feeling caught out. Suddenly he feels like his silence has been a front, like he’s deliberately been fucking with all the people who love him, like he’s been faking. ‘Goldbricking’, as his Mom used to say, when he tried to pretend he was sick so he wouldn’t have to go to school. Derek’s arms close around him more firmly when the guilt begins to waft off of him, and he rumbles in his chest, soft henley soothing under Stiles’ forehead.

“It’ll take time, Erica,” Derek says repressively. “Leave it.”

One hand smooths down the line of Stiles’ spine, coming to rest warm and certain in the cradle of his back. “What are you thinking?” he asks Stiles. His head turns briefly at the question, and Stiles knows he’s staring at the backpack, the pad of paper in it. Derek is giving him permission to remain mute if he chooses, without judgement, and Stiles sighs a little in relief. Somehow, it gives him courage.

Keeping his face buried in magnificent pectorals, hands clenched tight around Derek’s waist, twisting in the fabric of his shirt, Stiles mumbles, “I thought I smelled the. The hunters. Again. At lunch. But then I—“ he trails off, and Derek rumbles consideringly.

“Hmmm. I did wonder. But. Then I couldn’t really smell anything, so I thought it was just paranoia.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Erica interrupts. She’s still standing there, only inches away from where Derek and Stiles stand embracing, and Stiles snorts a little. Werewolves and their nutty sense of personal space.

He rolls his head to the side so he can see her. The makeup she wears to school makes her eyes look very wide and bright, and she smells of gentle concern and curiosity. She smells safe. Like pack. And leather. And hairspray. And girl. Stiles sucks in a lungfull before gathering his resolve and saying, “I don’t know where Scott is.”

Erica's brows draw down. "Did you ask his mom?" she says after a moment. Erica has a mom, too, although they're not close, so she'd think of something like that.

Stiles nods. "Texted her," he says, rusty and creaky. His speech feels like an antique car, junked in an old barn, pulled out after 30 years of neglect. "She doesn't always answer, if it gets busy at the hospital."

Derek nods, moving his hands up and down across Stiles' back and shoulders. "Let's wait until we hear from her before we panic," he says.

"We were panicking?" Erica asks, face smoothed into a mow of surprise before her eyebrows shoot up. "Over Scott? What does he have to do with anything? I thought we were only worried about, you know, *hunters*. And dickbag bullies at school. Definitely the bullies."

Stiles grimaces and shrugs. "He's my friend," he rasps. "And this isn't like him. And. The hunters are still out there, we know they are."

Derek walks Stiles backwards, around the coffee table, until he bumps into the sofa and drops down. "You stay here. Do your homework. Rest. I'll go to Scott's and see what I can find."

"But—"

"No. Stay here. Look, if this required hearing, I'd bring you, because your hearing is definitely better than mine. But in detecting smells, we are equally equipped, and I have much more experience. You and Erica stay here. Call me if you learn anything. I'll be back soon." He takes a few swift steps over to the kitchen, snags Stiles' backpack, and then turns to dump it on the sofa next to him. Then he drops to his knees between Stiles still-sprawled legs. "We'll find him," he says, and he sounds so confident that Stiles impossibly finds himself relaxing. "It's probably nothing."

With that, Derek leans forward, slipping his hand around the nape of Stiles' neck and pulling him forward into a kiss. It starts soft, comforting, but when Stiles opens his mouth slightly to protest, Derek angles his tongue inside, and then everything is heat and wet – a slow, lulling tide of sensation. Stiles closes his eyes. He can sense Erica just a few feet away. He knows she's watching unabashedly, but again, werewolves and their strange lack of privacy: it really doesn't matter. To her or to him, which is nice, since Stiles has spent much of his life self-conscious.

Derek can wrap one hand around more than half of Stiles' slender neck. The velvet collar (red, because Derek had quickly noticed Stiles' preference for the color, and the allusion to that fairy tale wrangler of wolves had amused him) bunches up under his palm, ruched thickly around the elastic band, a reminder of both what Stiles has been through and the care and steps taken to make him feel safe and comfortable. That Stiles has chosen today to actually speak in front of anyone other

than Derek is amazing, and should be celebrated, but Derek wants to be careful not to send Stiles haring back into his fortress of silence. The few times he's heard Stiles speak have been a gift and he doesn't want to risk delaying it further by making a big deal, which Stiles obviously doesn't want.

The boy's lips are soft against Derek's. Everything about him is soft: the baby fine skin of his cheeks, which even weeks without shaving had scarcely left with a patchy bristle, and now a razor leaves smooth for *days*. The look in his eyes when he gazes up at Derek, silently confiding his troubles and asking for help. The hollow at the base of his skull and the dip of his waist just above his hips.

When Stiles feels safer, when he doesn't measure out his words with effort and fear, Derek knows that his voice will be smooth as well, surprisingly deep and mellow, enriched with intelligence and humor, and Derek wants nothing more than to give Stiles the environment he needs to let that inhibition go.

But for now, Derek has his sub loosening, going pliant against him, still worried, but willing to be distracted. This is his mate, and Derek is only too happy to give him what he needs. He leans Stiles further back, to slump into the sofa, and with one hand, inexorably tugs his hips forward, until they are scarcely resting on the edge of the cushion, with Derek's body to keep him from slipping to the floor. He lets his weight drop, because Stiles always shivers and sighs when that happens, when he's buried under the heat and muscle of his mate. It happens now, and Stiles opens his mouth a little wider, which Derek takes full advantage of. For a while, he loses himself in the taste and smell of Stiles. In his softly encouraging moans, in the tightening of strong thighs around his own, the implied desperation in the heedlessly tight grip of long, slender fingers around his biceps. Stiles licks back at him, no dropped sub for now, but one actively chasing his pleasure with a new confidence that has blossomed through Derek's careful cultivation, because he has made such an effort to never make Stiles feel bad or awkward or unwelcome: and this is the benefit his patience has reaped.

The rich, sweet smell of desire begins to grow, and Stiles' legs pull Derek closer, mouth pressing more fervently against his own.

Erica lets out a soft whoop from where she's settled into a chair on the other side of the coffee table. "Oh, wow. Are you gonna go all the way? Will there be nakedness and sexin'? Damn, if it weren't for Boyd, I'd jump in there with you. I mean. Are you up for a threesome? Or a foursome? Because—"

Derek pulls away from Stiles slowly. Stiles, who tensed with embarrassment, but whose body is having trouble maintaining any stiffness (besides the obvious) due to the flood of endorphins currently running through his veins. Derek keeps his teeth gently closed over Stiles' bottom lip as he retreats, sucking steadily until it pops free, concurrent with Stiles' whining gasp. Only far enough away to focus on Stiles' face without being cross-eyed, Derek gives him a slow, smoldering smirk to head off the gentle scent of embarrassment before he turns to Erica and says, "You wish."

"Yes," she says solemnly. "Yes, I do. I do wish. 'Cause that was totally hot."

Derek rolls his eyes before pushing Stiles' hips back, helping him straighten from his pheromone-inebriated sprawl. Stiles, picking up on Derek's non-too-subtle cues, scoots the rest of the way upright and peeks around his shoulder to wink at Erica, the impish little bugger, even though his face is flushing bright red.

“All mine,” he croaks with a cocky smirk, spreading his fingers wide over Derek’s head and back, as though he could shield all of him from Erica’s lascivious assessment. “No sharing.” And Derek can’t stop himself from swaying forward to kiss him again. Because this. *This* is what he wants. A happy, sassy sub, secure and loved, brightening all the dark corners of Derek’s home.

“All yours, baby,” he breathes into Stiles’ ear, inducing a full-body shiver. He nibbles there for just a second, then rubs the bristle of his jaw down Stiles’ neck. “Only you.”

The boy closes both hands on either side of Derek’s face, pushing him away enough to get a good look. His pink lips are swollen, enticingly parted, his pale skin flushed rosy and his eyes sparkle, cola color losing to the black expanse of pupils directed at something they want. He glances up quickly, a cheeky move that is very nearly an unapologetic roll of the eyes, and his mouth widens into a luminous smile before he leans forward to butt his forehead against Derek’s. It’s a little too hard, clumsy, and he sits back with a grimace followed by a grin. He pushes Derek away with a meaningful look. *Go find Scott*, it says. *Find Scott, and then come back to me, and we’re gonna continue this*. Huh. Guess Stiles is done with verbalizing for the time being. That’s okay. Derek is patient.

He surges to his feet in one effortless move and rubs his thumbs on Stiles temples before turning away. *I’ll take care of it*, is what he tries to express. Then he turns to Erica and growls playfully. He spreads his fingers wide and covers her entire face with one hand, turning it to the side. “Mine,” he says again.

Erica boldly licks the palm of his hand, sloppy and disgusting enough for him to flinch. “Aww, boss, you never share,” she whines, muffled. Derek’s shoulders twitch with suppressed laughter, and he pushes his beta back into her chair by her face, happy to see that the pack dynamic has so easily assimilated Stiles, once they’d had sufficient exposure. “Save it,” he says laconically.

“Hey, are we gonna start using two word sentences? Will that be a pack thing? It can be the Hale Pack signature. One word conversations. Two at most. Damn, that’s gonna be a challenge, but you know I’m loyal, boss. I’ll start on it no—”

Derek growls over the choppy laughter from behind him, and then turns for the door, wiping his hand on the seat of his jeans. “Stay. Safe,” he commands on the way out, and closes the door on Erica’s howls of laughter and the happy scent of his sub.

Distraction accomplished.

Chapter End Notes

[The History of Salt](#)

Search for Scott

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Derek returns to the loft, he's tired, stymied and his previously perfunctory worry for and about Scott has escalated. The hunters are patently still around, have even been near the school, and Scott has regrettably not demonstrated a reliable ability to keep his mouth shut thus far. It's too easy to believe that he'd said something that might have exposed them and thus been spirited away for 'questioning'. The McCall house had been empty, Melissa's car gone, and Scott's bike as well. Scott isn't in Derek's pack, but it's clear that Stiles considers him part of his *own*, and that means Derek has responsibilities.

As Derek locks his car and takes the stairs three at a time, he puzzles over the fact that his pack appears to be *doubling* in size. Where it used to consist only of him and his three betas, somehow, adding Stiles means the inevitable inclusion of Scott and John and Melissa, regardless of the fact that Derek has no emotional ties to them... but only because his commitment to Stiles is so solid that it doesn't even occur to him not to embrace the people that Stiles considers the most important. It's not official, of course. But someday it will be. *Eight*, he thinks, a little awestruck. A pack of eight. It's nowhere near as big as the Hale pack used to be, but it's a good number, and Derek tucks that future away in a warm place in his heart.

Stiles is alone when Derek returns, Erica evidently having gone home for the evening. He sits up straight on the edge of the couch; clearly he'd heard Derek from at least down in the parking lot. Derek pauses just inside the door to breathe him in, the ineffable scent of him, of heat and spicy things, yes, of citrus and salt, but so much more than the sum of its parts, this scent, which on such a primal level broadcasts *home* and *stability* and *joy*, especially when it twines around the scent of their den, their pack. Derek closes his eyes (reluctantly, because that boy is a *vision*, fair skin and sharp angles glowing in the soft amber pool of light spilling from the wall) breathing in a river of chemical and emotional triggers that slowly stoke him into a curiously rapt sense of relaxation, in which fears and concerns recede, but his desire to *enter*, to *leap in with all four feet* swells. It's rather like a lazy orgasm, really: relaxing and stimulating at the same time. Stiles' signature is pure magic, and Derek hesitates on the threshold, savoring it, until Stiles makes a face at him, lush lips pursing with impatience.

His schoolbooks are put away, bag near his feet, and his bearing is alert, worried and demanding. He stands when Derek finally closes the door behind himself, rolling his hand with eyebrows up. His meaning is clear, *Well? What did you find?*

Derek sighs, scrubbing a hand through the hair on the back of his head, recalled back to the real world. "I didn't find him," he answers. He shrugs out of his jacket and tosses it over the back of the sofa, chunks the keys down on the wooden coffee table. "His mom must still be at work. I checked around his house, the school, the hospital.... I couldn't find a meaningful trail." He pulls his mouth tight at the corners, frustrated with himself, feels his eyebrows shifting, drawing together to express his mood. "I looked around Deaton's, too, since you said he works there, but there was nothing recent, and Deaton was already gone, so I couldn't ask him."

Stiles shakes his head, although it's unclear whether he thinks Deaton would have been a dead-end or whether he's similarly baffled.

Derek tries, “If Mrs. McCall saw him this morning—”

Stiles interrupts him to show him his phone, where a short text conversation with ‘Mama McCall’ reveals that, *I haven’t seen him since yesterday morning, I’ve been working the late shift all week. He hasn’t been at school? Did you ask Allison?* The conversation is only about 10 minutes old, and Derek assumes she hasn’t called yet because she doesn’t know that Stiles is able to speak now.

“And when did *you* last...” he pauses, because saying ‘speak’ is limiting, “... have contact with him?”

“Yesterday.” Stiles rasps, and stops to cough and clear his throat. He collapses dramatically onto the couch before continuing, “When we dropped him off after school.”

Derek sits next to Stiles, and the boy immediately presses up against his side, which makes Derek flash a small smile. No matter what’s going on, he’s pleased that Stiles shows such trust in him, that he seeks and finds comfort from Derek’s mere presence. He pauses a moment to trace the velvet collar around Stiles’ neck, the dark wine color of it enhancing the pink in his cheeks, his lips. He leans over to scent him, rubbing his jaw along Stiles’ temple and the crest of his skull, enjoying the drag and catch of his stubble intermingling with Stiles’ shorn hair.

Stiles melts into him, giving an erratically maintained little hum, turning his head into Derek’s jaw, nudging at him with his nose. For long minutes they do this, just hang on to one another, buffering themselves against the coming storm. Derek turns a little and scoops Stiles closer, pulling him nearly onto his lap, one hand encircling his neck and the other sweeping up and down the gently curved length of his spine, from collar to tailbone, and Stiles sighs, shudders, clings to his shoulder and waist, fingers kneading.

“What if they have him?” Stiles whispers what they’re both thinking. “The hunters.” His fingertips dig in, and he draws in a shaking breath. “They. Might be torturing him *right* now. And he doesn’t even know. They’re gonna hurt him. They’re gonna hurt him—”

Derek can smell the sudden salinity of tearful eyes, and holds the shaking boy close, pressing his lips against his head, his ear, his temple. “Shhh,” he gentles, and tries to push stability and reassurance and strength down the bond – currently broadcasting fear and remembered pain – as well as demonstrate it with his voice and his body.

(This isn’t necessarily easy. Derek wouldn’t like to admit it, but the hunters terrify him, too. He has had *years* to overcome the experience of his youth and the terrible lesson learned in sudden, unimaginable violence and just as sudden tragic and overwhelming loss. But healing doesn’t mean that he is unblemished; it just means that he can function around some very deep and debilitating scarring. Their recent kidnapping and torture had ripped open those old wounds, and while he wasn’t surprised (the adult Derek is much more of a cynic than he had been as a naif 15-year-old: he fully *expects* that people can and will be horrifically cruel). But while he hadn’t felt safe, necessarily, before he’d been captured, he’d been... complacent. It had been a *decade*, after all. He’d built a life for himself and tried to move on. While he still had nightmares – endless, oppressive nights where he had to leap up and shift and run and run away from his memories until dawn streaked the sky and his paws bled – those nights had grown fewer with each passing year.

In a simple, selfish, animal way, he was *grateful* that Stiles had been in that cell with him... even if they hadn’t formed any kind of connection, even if Stiles hadn’t turned out to be his mate, a perfect complement that filled so many of the papered-over fractures in Derek’s ravaged soul. Because he

thinks he would not have survived without a cellmate to care for, allowing him to focus on something other than that torrent of suffering and hopeless resignation, giving him someone to fight for and something meaningful to control. It was so much easier to be calm and strong for someone else than it was when it was yourself alone: projecting serenity helped him to feel that way. And now, with Scott missing and the prospect that they could potentially devolve into the anathema of the hunters' clutches, he was pretending to be unaffected, really. Not due to some internalized Alpha machismo, as Derek could literally give no fucks about what anyone thought about his Dominance, but because acting impervious helps him to insulate his own panic.)

Derek leans to the side, rearranges the both of them until they're stretched out lengthwise on the couch, Stiles tucked securely between Derek and the back, face pressed damply against his throat, hands curled at his chest, winding in his shirt. Derek croons and hums, says soft, disjointed things about it being too soon to worry, they simply don't have enough information, but they're going to find him, *Stiles, we're going to find him, we won't let that happen to your friend.*

It isn't too long before Stiles pulls himself together. Derek can see his resolution in the line of his shoulders and the strength of his back. He can feel it through their connection, quickening with determination and courage.

"Gotta go talk to Dad and Melissa," Stiles says, turning his face up to peer at Derek.

"Do you want me to do it?" Derek asks, nonjudgemental. He expects Stiles to say yes, because so far he's only spoken to two people other than Derek – Erica and Allison – but both of those instances were out of concern for Scott, so he probably shouldn't have been surprised when Stiles answers,

"No, I'll do it. Drive me home?"

"Of course, baby." Derek doesn't release him until he's pressed a quick kiss to the corner of his jaw, followed with a little bite that makes Stiles gasp and smother a surprised laugh. "Your dad will be expecting you soon, anyway."

Stiles grabs his phone and in a sudden flurry of fingers, as Derek shamelessly looks over his shoulder, tells Melissa that they're going to meet with his Dad and see if they can't locate Scott, since apparently no one's seen him. It dings back almost immediately, Melissa saying *I'll be there in 15*. Derek isn't surprised that she is casually ditching her shift, if no one's seen her son in at least 24 hours.

John is sitting at the kitchen table when they get back to Stiles' house. He broadcasts fatigue, wrinkles alongside his eyes and mouth etched a little deeper than they are on weekends, although he looks miles better than he did when Derek first brought Stiles back to him. His eyes brighten when they land on his son, and his face rearranges itself from stress and exhaustion into a smile of welcome. "Son," he says, standing up. "Derek." He takes two steps forward and folds Stiles into a firm hug, rubbing his hand across Stiles' fuzzy hair and pressing his nose near the back of his head as it tilts down to lay on his shoulder.

Derek has to stop himself from interfering. John is human, and has no idea that he's challenging Derek for his packmate, scenting him in such a way.

John lets go and steps back, his face lightening. "You're home a little earlier than I thought you'd be, kiddo. Have you eaten? I was going to order takeout—" He wanders toward the menu drawer and palms the phone from a counter.

Stiles shakes his head. "Dad—"

John jolts as though hit with voltage. "*Stiles*," he gasps, dropping the phone with a clatter and spinning around. He strides back over to his son, grasping him at both shoulders, giving him a tiny, affectionate shake. "You're talking!" He grins, wide and joyful, and Stiles gets pulled into a longer, stronger hug, and when John closes his eyes, Derek can see that his lashes are wet. John looks up to give Derek a nod with a heartrendingly happy expression, keeping Stiles' head at his shoulder with a large hand around the back of it.

"Did you hear that?" he asks Derek proudly, as if Stiles had just toddled his first steps. "My son is—" he gets choked up. Derek nods, reflecting John's pride, relief and happiness back at him. The situation might suck, but knowing that Stiles is feeling comfortable enough to venture once again into verbal communication means that he's broken through a barrier within himself, and that means that he's healing, and really, there's nothing better to witness than that (for Derek, or, he is certain, John).

Stiles pulls back a little, after an extended embrace, and John grabs him again, giving him a kiss on the forehead and an excited hair-rumple before letting him free. "Kiddo.... It's *so good* to hear your voice. I thought I'd never see the day." He's beaming, and Stiles smiles back, but he's nowhere near as elated as John. Of course, he hasn't yet imparted his bad news.

He makes a doleful moue at his dad and lifts his arms to hold his father at the elbows, which John mimics, so that they are connected at four points. "Dad," he says again. "It's about Scott."

John's face immediately falls, a flash of disappointment followed by a shrewd glance. He straightens, and suddenly his bearing reads *Sheriff* more than *father*. "What did he do, Stiles? Did he blab?"

"What? No!" Stiles shakes his head, and clears his throat again. Derek, scenting Stiles' agitation – soapy and alkaline – steps up behind him and puts a hand casually against one hip, offering support. "We can't find him, Dad." The more Stiles speaks, the less gravelly his voice. "He didn't meet me this morning, he wasn't in his classes, and I haven't talked to him since just after school yesterday. I texted Melissa, and she hasn't seen him in even longer than that."

John's face gets more and more serious as Stiles goes on. "So, we're talking more than 24 hours, here."

Stiles waggles his hand in a so-so gesture. "Unless he was at lacrosse practice."

Derek pulls his phone out of his pocket at that, and shoots a text to Isaac. The three stand quietly in the kitchen, each carefully not staring at the other, as they wait. The phone beeps in less than a minute. Derek reads it and shakes his head. "Isaac says he wasn't at practice yesterday or today."

Stiles sucks in a sharp breath, and Derek fingers tighten, drawing him closer to his side.

John slaps his hands on his thighs. “Alright,” he says after a brief pause. He looks at Derek, “Are we fairly certain that it’s related to the hunters?”

Derek shrugs helplessly. “I didn’t smell them near his house. Stiles and I might have caught a trace of them at school today, but it was very faint. I just... really can’t say with any certainty.”

John nods. “I’ll talk to Melissa, and get out an Amber Alert immediately, then.”

At that moment, a car bumps carelessly up onto the drive, going rather too fast, and squeals to a halt. The door is slammed, and footsteps hurry up to the porch. Stiles has already darted around the corner to open the front door before Melissa has a chance to ring the bell. “Stiles!” she says, although Derek can’t think why she’s surprised to see him. “Hey, honey. Now tell me what’s going on with Scott?”

John crowds up behind Stiles and Derek, and all four of them stand in an uncomfortable five square feet. Derek wiggles back as subtly and gracefully as possible, looking for air that isn’t quite so tainted with stress and worry. Although, in a way, he likes being crowded, because it reminds him of the pack he grew up in, when, in spite of the size of their house, they always huddled together in the kitchen to talk. Derek has a sudden, vivid memory of Laura shouting to everyone to freeze, and then counting the tiles they stood on. It had only been six of them, at the time, and they’d stood upon only 14 tiles, each tucked up close to their neighbor. Laura’s inelegant snorting rings in his ears, for a moment, and Derek takes another step back, shaking off his disorientation. Stiles gestures Melissa inside, and they all tumble into the living room, Stiles pulling Melissa down to sit next to him on the sofa. John stands in front of them, and Derek takes up rear guard.

John opens his mouth, and then glances at Stiles, eyebrows lifting in query. Stiles takes it from there. “I was supposed—”

“Oh my god, Stiles! You’re talking again!” Melissa takes a minute just to be excited about that, and proud of Stiles, and pulls him into a fierce hug. “Unh, my baby, it’s *so nice to hear your voice!*” She frames his face briefly with her hands, eyes shining.

Stiles smiles and nods a little when she loosens her grip enough for him to breathe, but continues with his story. “Yesterday after school, Scott said he’d need a ride this morning.” Melissa nods, fingers wringing against each other: it seems like she knows whatever circumstances had lead up to that. “But he wasn’t there. And his phone is either off or dead. No one saw him at practice yesterday, which means the last time he’s accounted for... that we know of... was 3:30 yesterday.”

“Jesus,” Melissa mumbles, and lifts a shaking hand to sweep a curl off her forehead. Her heart pounds in a frenzy, and Derek can hear the breath shaking in her lungs. She suddenly seems washed out in her scrubs, looking every year of her age and then some. John sits next to her and takes both her hands in his. “I’ll call in an Amber Alert, Melissa. They always get fast results, you know they do. The whole state will be looking. We’ll find him.”

Melissa looks over at Stiles and then back to Derek. Her eyes are wide and fearful. “Does this have to do with—?”

Derek shrugs apologetically as Stiles says, “We don’t know yet, Mrs. McCall. But we’re going to find out.”

She turns to him, then, and puts her hand on the side of his face, looking very serious. “Okay. But Stiles, you need to be *careful*. I need you safe. I need *one* of you safe—” she breaks off with a

choppy breath, and her nose turns red from repressed tears.

Stiles gives her a hug. "We will," he says. "I'll have Derek with me. We'll take care of each other."

John frowns at both of them. "You're not going off on your own, either of you. For now, you're staying right here while I go to work to get that Amber underway." He stands, pulling Melissa up behind him. "You come with me, Melissa, your statement will make the whole process faster."

John grabs his keys and jacket and reaches the door before he turns around. "Derek..."

Derek waits, trying to arrange his face into *affable* and *reliable*.

"Do you think he'll be safer *here* with you... or with your pack?"

Derek sighs in relief. "We're better off all together. I'll bring him home with me, and get them all to school tomorrow. I'll keep you updated."

John nods once, briskly, and then wheels onto the porch, Melissa close behind him. Derek and Stiles just stand there for a moment, staring into the darkened yard, before Derek pulls the door closed and locks it. "Fetch what you need for tonight and tomorrow," he says. "We'll go straight back to the loft."

Stiles looks at him for a minute, and then smirks. "Fetch," he laughs to himself. "Right."

Derek rolls his eyes. "You think I haven't heard all the dog jokes, Stiles?"

Stiles grins, although it's faint, and both of them relax a little after the exchange.

As Stiles goes upstairs, Derek already has his phone out, composing a group text to his pack, telling them what's going on and making sure they're safe.

Chapter End Notes

Oops. I just accidentally added about 1500 words this morning, which means this chapter is probably filled with typos and errors (feel free to point them out!) Wildamongwolves mentioned (thank you, darling!) that Derek didn't seem very traumatized, and I thought, *Oh, that seems very much like a failing on my part*, and thought I'd shoehorn that in. Is it too ungraceful? Too expository? Anyway, I just wanted to get you inside his head. Mostly, he's not falling down because he's moving too fast... it's as effective a coping strategy as any other, I suppose. And a Dom deals with uncertainty by using control as a tool: whether it's feeding and caring for Stiles or making sure he gets to school safely and is well-guarded while he's there.

On an unrelated note: yesterday I read [**Good Boys**](#), (featuring Cherik, from the X-Men fandom, if any of y'all are into that) which is amazing and sexy and funny, so I thought I'd share that. (It's a little like [**No Homo**](#) by [**RemainNameless**](#) in that it's also about a character

who has no concept that he might be a little homo. If you haven't read that one, you definitely should!) Also, the writer's style really reminded me of Jennifer Crusie, whom I haven't read in about 4 years, since I've been all m/m fanfiction, but she's one of my favorites, and if you ever read actual published het fiction, you should check her out. My favorite is [Agnes and the Hitman](#), which will totally have you laughing out loud even while it's a great mystery with lovely sex.

Also, I'm sorry I didn't get to all of your lovely and thoughtful comments from the last chapter. Don't stop just because I'm such a slacker: I can't tell you how much I enjoy getting them!

Exploration

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles flicks his ear at an annoying buzz, grumbles to himself and then slowly opens one eye. He finds that he is looking down his own sharp snout, black whiskers like a line drawing across the white sheet. Derek wheezes gently behind him, a mountainous, reassuring presence at his back, paws curled protectively around him, nestling him in the soft fur the wolf's belly.

He stands up, four legs wobbly on the uncertain footing of the mattress, and picks his way over Erica, Boyd and Isaac, all helter-skelter about the bed, but each with their nose pushed into a packmate's fur. Erica growls a bit as he scrambles up her side, and he yips softly, jokingly, when he slides down her back. His phone is on the night table, the alarm going full tilt now, and Stiles whines a little. He can't reach it from here, and shedding his fur is likely to make him cold, and he doesn't *waaanna*. A pale, muscular forearm extends past him, grabs the phone and snakes it away. There. Derek probably won't even notice the cold, naked or not.

The annoying buzzing stops, and the three betas stir and groan their relief. Derek, lifted up on one elbow, smiles at Stiles, reaches over to scruff the top of his head and then flick an ear before scooping him up and drawing him back in, this time to perch on Derek's, very human, chest.

While it is comforting to wear his fur, Stiles shimmies fluidly back into human form, because how can he resist stretching his body along the length of Derek's, skin to skin. Stiles knows Derek will keep him warm. Derek hums at him, a low and rumble approval, and immediately wraps him up in thick arms.

Stiles ducks his head, a little shy in his audacity, but Derek doesn't seem to mind at all, sweeping a possessive palm down his back and over the curve of one buttock. Stiles gasps a little, wiggles into the grip, and he can smell Derek's interest pique, warm and spicy. He lifts up onto his elbows, looking down at the stark planes and angles of Derek's face – too sharply etched for even sleep to soften – and gets lost for a moment in the jewel-like sparkle of Derek's focus, until he's distracted by hair-roughened skin over solid muscle working up between his thighs, pressing alluringly against his balls, the bottom of his ass. Stiles pushes back against it, feels his cock heat and fill, and Derek grins up at him, predatory and provoking.

"Duuude," Boyd complains, after shifting and rolling off the bed with a thump. "Y'all gonna just do that right here with all us around?"

When Derek twists his head to make the rolling of his eyes more effective, Stiles buries his face in Derek's chest, but keeps his mouth open, licking and biting... *just a little! He's not without social grace!*

Isaac scrambles for the exit on four legs, and a naked Boyd drags away an equally nude, cackling Erica by the elbow, shutting the door smartly behind them.

"That's one sure-fire way to get everyone up," Derek notes, smirking.

Stiles drops his head and feels out Derek's nipple with his tongue, intrigued by the bead of it, hidden in dark hair. Derek moans a little, wraps his hand around the back of Stiles head to hold it

gently in place, lifts his thigh harder between Stiles legs, the hand on his ass pushing against him in guiding pulses, encouraging him to roll his hips and seek his pleasure.

Stiles has no idea what he's doing, okay, but he can clearly recall what it felt like when Derek toyed with *his* nipples, the bright sting of heat that travelled under his skin, the taut sensation of expectation and arousal when he suckled or nipped. It must be similar for Derek. In spite of the vast difference in their appearance, one so slender and fragile, the other so solid and strong... they are both men. They share similar biology, and Stiles figures they must be wired pretty much the same. Physically, at least. Mentally, obviously, it's rather different, particularly their dynamics with respect to D/s. *Which is a good thing!* Stiles hurries to amend in his thoughts. *Wouldn't want that any other way!*

Cautiously, he licks until the hairs around the little nub are wet, laved to fair skin. Derek's chest is so developed that his pecs are very nearly breasts in how they lift and present his nipple: it's easy to close his mouth around it, to draw it between his lips, circle with his tongue, tentatively bite at the skin around it. Derek groans approvingly, and his fingers scrape across Stiles' scalp while the length of him undulates beneath Stiles, lifting him like a hot, determinedly polite earthquake.

Stiles grins. *Success!* He has done a sexy thing to his Dom, all on his own initiative, and here the man is, expressing approval and enveloping them both in the rich, validating scent of his lust.

Stiles takes a moment to be grateful that he's now a werefox, with so many more senses with which to read the world. (The world and its methods of communication have always been a bit bewildering to him, and having new tools available to interpret it is very helpful.)

As if he can sense Stiles' brief divergence into introspection, Derek pinches his rear before creeping his fingers along the line underneath it until he can probe into that dark crevasse.

Stiles *melts*. It's probably seriously graceless. He just goes boneless as Derek's fingertip toys with his actual asshole, and there he is, face down, mouth open, tongue practically flopping, hips rutting and knees drawing up, spreading out, fingers clawing into biceps he just always, *always* wants to touch.

Derek exhales encouragement at Stiles' surrender, chuckles quietly while Stiles is distracted with *finger! in my asshole!* "Come on, baby boy," he challenges. "Show me what you can do." He relaxes measurably, sinking into the mattress, and the hand that had been guiding Stiles' head slips to lie beside him. Derek, proud Alpha, testosterone-dusted Dom, preternaturally gorgeous man, lies still and relaxed underneath Stiles, smiling. "C'mon, gorgeous," he murmurs, husky sex voice making Stiles shiver. "You feel so good." He... *ripples*... and Stiles accidentally drools on him. *Whoops! That never happened!* He quickly wipes it up with his forearm and hopes Derek didn't notice. But just. Ohmygawd all this fucking sexy, what is he supposed to do.

Derek keeps rubbing gently around his hole, but otherwise indicates in every possible way that his body is there for Stiles' enjoyment. His face is smooth, without stress, his eyes dark with desire and bright with cautious challenge. Stiles perceives that he is being given an opportunity, if he wants to take it. And boy howdy, does he, indeed.

He's aware, in the back of his mind, that he shouldn't be messing around with Derek right now, for so many reasons. Scott is missing, the puppies are showering and stumbling around in the kitchen, Stiles has *no fucking clue* what he's doing.... And yet.

He puts one hand cautiously around Derek's wrist. Not really holding him down, not even pretending, but really more just anchoring himself. Derek hums, moves his other hand (*Nooo, no,*

don't stop touching the place, that felt good... but... oh... maybe this is good, too...) and mirrors the other, so that Stiles can hold them both.

Stiles leans up and presses a quick kiss to the sharp line of Derek's jaw, rubbing his lips across the bristle of his scruff before biting at the hinge there, migrating down to gnaw at Derek's neck (which makes him jolt and moan) and suck on the lobe of his ear. Derek keeps up a running commentary, as if making up for Stiles' lack thereof. While Stiles tentatively explores Derek's body and reactions, he's showered in *Good boy, god, you feel so good. That's it, Stiles, I like that. Unh, your mouth, fuck, it's all I think about.*

Stiles works a hicky low on Derek's neck and watches with scientific curiosity as it fades away. He glances coyly up at Derek, whose lids are lowered over gleaming crimson eyes, whose human-shifting-to-lupine teeth dent the line of his lower lip, who has a droplet of sweat forming at his temple, slipping away to vanish in his hair.

Stiles sits up on his knees, crotch to belly, trails his hands across Derek's chest, traces the delineation of his pectorals, biceps, abdominal muscles, tugs inquisitively at the hair around his navel. Derek's blinks are slower and slower, his narration progressively more filthy. *Fuck, yes, baby, love your hands on me, love to see you touching me. You're so beautiful up there, gods, I want to fuck you...* Stiles gasps at the last one, and Derek's gaze sharpens too rapidly, belying his relaxed posture. Oh, so, he's still paying close attention.

(There's the startling crash and splash of a dropped coffee in the kitchen, and Boyd whines, "Oh, jesus, can we just walk to school?" – but they ignore that.)

"Not right now, honey," Derek says to Stiles, very clearly, firmly reassuring. "We're not going to do anything you don't want to do. Look, look at me, baby. I'm still lying here: not going to do anything –"

Stiles shuts him up with a kiss, opening his mouth hopefully against Derek's lips and shivering when his tongue comes out to play, wet and hot and comfortingly experienced. The heels of his hands dig into Derek's ribs, bearing his weight, but the Alpha doesn't complain. Stiles can feel Derek's cock, twitching against his ass as they kiss, and just the *idea* of it makes his blood surge, makes the muscles in his thighs and belly pulse.

He pulls away, sits back, and Derek puts his hands on each of Stiles' knees, warm and steady. His lips are wet and red, swollen... obscene in the rough frame of his beard. In spite of his obvious arousal, he's watching Stiles closely, carefully heeding his boundaries, and that's more soothing than Stiles would like to admit to. He may be on top, but Derek is in control... he'll stop things if Stiles starts to overextend himself, and that realization is profoundly comforting, a tether for the giddy delight in sexual exploration that he hasn't been able to indulge in before.

He keeps his eyes glued to Derek's when he wiggles backwards, lifting himself over the bob of Derek's cock, settling on his thighs. He licks his lips, takes in a deep breath, and Derek's hands close around his knees, steady and grounding, thumbs rubbing small circles at the sides of them.

"Nothing you don't want to do, baby," he says, so low it's almost a whisper. "Only what you want. That's what makes me happy, is seeing you take care of yourself. Don't bite off too much at once." He immediately scrunches his nose at the verb he chose, especially in reference to exploring his cock, and Stiles snorts.

"I won't bite," he promises, and they both relax. Stiles watches himself touching Derek, his fingers (*his! fingers!*) pressing lightly into Derek's skin, down the column of his throat, tracing the hollow and rise of collarbones thickly cushioned with muscle, unlike Stiles' own, which are sharp and jutting. He threads his fingers through the thick hair on Derek's chest, noting the texture, the color, the way Derek twitches and breathes into it when it's pulled, when it's smoothed. Further down he goes, outspread fingers spanning Derek's waist, thumbs dipping into his navel, a fascinating well framed in dark, swirling hair.

Derek grabs Stiles' pillow and props it behind his head, so that he can sit up a bit, more clearly able to watch Stiles' journey, both trepidatious and bold. Finally, Stiles gets to his cock. His heart speeds up, and his breaths become choppy. Derek lifts up a little more, slides his hand along Stiles' jaw, nudging until they're eye to eye. "Don't push yourself," he says. "Only what you want." His thumb traces Stiles' lower lip, fingers sliding back through his short hair. "I don't expect anything."

Stiles takes a deep breath, scoffs and turns his head to find Derek's thumb and bite it. "'M'fine," he mumbles around his mouthful, and Derek reclines once again, accepting his word.

Stiles swallows and lets his eyes drop the rest of the way. He's been so *curious* about Derek's cock. He's felt it against him, glimpsed it here and there, but never had the courage to *study* it. It is thick and veiny, dark red and lying flat against his stomach. The flow of blood is visible under such thin skin... Stiles can read each beat of Derek's heart here, even if he couldn't clearly hear it. He touches it with a fingertip, just under the glans, and it flings itself upward towards his touch, making Stiles startle and then smile. He rests the pads of his fingers on the tangled tracework of veins and *feels* the blood surge. He can hear it as well, a rushing not unlike static.

The tip glistens with precome, and Stiles daringly touches that as well, strangely breathless at the sight of the strand that stretches between his finger and Derek's cock, so delicate yet persistent. The sweet-sharp smell of it fills his nose, coats his mouth, dropped open in his concentration, and Stiles absently licks his lips, eyes darting up to Derek when the man groans. He's got his Alpha eyes on, a reflective, crimson burn. "Stiles," he says, but then just pants, and Stiles drops his gaze again, bravely smoothing the glistening fluid around the corona, painting it in sex and anticipation.

Derek's sac is hidden between his legs, but he obligingly separates them when Stiles goes to fish it out, and then Stiles has got it in his hand, all fragile skin, lightly furred, plump with the heavy testicles they bear. He looks up at Derek again, checking his reactions as he carefully squeezes, gives a tug. "Feels good," Derek pants. "That's great, baby boy. Everywhere you touch me. You make me feel so good, and you don't even know. You don't know how good it makes me feel that you *want* to. I didn't expect—"

There's an exasperated groan from downstairs, a the cracking retort of a slap, and Erica hisses, "Be *quiet*," and Isaac says, "Stop it, give them some privacy." Suddenly NPR is broadcast through the kitchen, and Stiles shakes his head to free his ears and thoughts of MarketPlace. (Now is *so* not the time for hipster economics.) He wraps his hand around Derek's shaft, so hot and velvet, and Derek *shudders*, arches back in the bed, head pressing against his stack of pillows and teeth clenched over a gurgled shout. "Baby—"

Stiles starts to lean forward, wants to taste, but he *can't*, he just can't contemplate putting it anywhere near his mouth, and his heart races, and he freezes, and Derek rises instantly, hand around Stiles' neck, fingers slipping under his collar, smoothing up and down the cervical vertebrae, drawing his eye away from where he had been focused.

"Not now," Derek says firmly. "Yellow. Do you hear me Stiles? Stop and breathe. I'm calling Yellow. I only want your hand. That's all I'm ready for, right now." His eyes are clear, now blue and green and gold, pale and cool and Stiles is so *relieved* that he nearly wants to cry, drops his head and lets Derek encircle his neck, sit up to breathe on his face, rub their cheeks together.

"You're only to do what feels good," he says, not as a Dom, but there's so much certainty that Stiles can feel himself relax. "Only what feels good for you, baby, that's what makes me happy."

And Stiles just spends a second moving his cheek across the corner of Derek's mouth, breathing in the pheromones released from the scent gland there, unfurling in the feeling of *belonging* as the chemicals cling to his skin, the inside of his mouth.

He nods, and Derek leans away, only a little, until Stiles pushes him all the way back down. He'll only touch. That's a good boundary. That... makes him feel safe, less exposed, less thin-skinned and brittle. There is what he *wants* to do... and then there is what he *can* do... and those aren't always the same things.

He looks down to where his hand is still wrapped around Derek's cock – it is just as rigid and enthusiastic as it was before, making Stiles smirk. He leans forward, sharply arches the small of his back, so that his own cock sweeps down, brushes against his knuckles, and he gasps at the intimacy of such a move.

He is balanced on a high wire, thrilled, stomach swooping, net far below (but it's *there*, it's there, and Derek is manning it, he's watching, and Stiles is *safe*). His lungs are tight, each breath only half what it should be, short and ineffectual. He peels his hand away from Derek and tries to enclose it around both of their lengths at once. His fingertips meet, barely, and he realizes his mouth is hanging open again.

Derek reaches down, wraps his hands around them as well, strong and sure, and when Stiles looks up, Derek is looking at him, rather than their hands, their cocks. That's reassuring. And also sexy. Stiles dips down to nose Derek's cheek, bite at his lower lip, and Derek's fingers tighten delightfully, making Stiles jump and undulate. The motion of his cock, sliding back and forward again through their intertwined fingers is dazzling, and Stiles is blinded as he chases that sensation, rocking back and forth, encouraged by Derek's low moans, stuttered words about his beauty, his bravery, how special and unique he is, how Derek's waited his whole life for this....

Stiles drops his head, and his weight, and just *takes*, ruts into the clinging funnel of their hands, basking in the awareness of Derek's erection clasped hot against his own, sliding skin, slick fluid, the scrub of hair and bruise of knuckle. He thinks distantly that he should be quiet, because his high, stifled cries should be for him and Derek alone; he knows that, but the pack animal in him doesn't care at all, is instinctually pleased even, to announce the strong bond between himself and the Alpha, the joy that he alone can give, the focus he has earned on his own, the ownership he feels over the hot, lascivious stare of their leader.

Stiles' skin flashes supernova, burning, and the shuddering tension that starts in his groin waves outward, zinging like electricity. Stiles can practically hear his neurons firing, frantic and extravagant, a juggernaut of sensation that crests as it meshes with Derek's grunts and ground out curses, free hand snaking like a strap around Stiles' shoulders, grounding him, and that's when he comes, and whoa, that's why they call it release, just, everything inside him, he'd been holding it back for so long, trying to keep control, and the freefall of letting go....

All Stiles registers is pleasure, vibrating through his body, dulling his mind. He can feel each nerve buzzing in the aftermath. He's wrung out, cleansed, and born anew. Derek leans up a moment later, clamps his teeth around Stiles' shoulder, and barks out his own completion, the smooth glide slickened further with Stiles' own come, and their mingled odors puff from between their bodies in an intoxicating cloud: sweat and come, repletion and trust and happiness and pride. Leather and forest, ginger and sass. Derek sucks where he bit, not hard enough to break skin (although strangely, Stiles really, *really* wants him to) and Stiles collapses on his chest, sloping to the right a bit. Their hearts are aligned, and slam against each other as though trying to escape the confines of their ribs to be together.

Stiles hears the grumbling of the puppies downstairs, a quickly shushed evaluation from Erica, the saucy thing, and the slow, contented rumble of his Alpha, fingers walking up his spine to tangle in his collar, and for a moment, all Stiles can do is feel, and listen, and purr until his body rattles with it.

Real life intrudes, inevitably, and Derek checks the time before pushing Stiles out of the bed: they have to hurry now, or they'll be late. John had insisted they all go to school, not least because he felt they'd be safer in a crowd. He'd told Derek to look around as much as possible, *while staying safe*, he added, in a very paternal kind of growl that made Derek frown, in memory of the boy he used to be, who trusted his parents to keep all the evils of the world at bay.

Now, Stiles is rushing, slapping at himself with a damp washcloth because there's no time for a shower, and Derek can smell his escalating stress and shame. He harrumphs in frustration, snags some things out of a drawer and crowds into the bathroom behind his sub, taking the cooling cloth out of his hand, arms coming to prop on the counter on each side, encasing Stiles against his body.

Stiles drops his head, staring at the sink, and Derek asks, "What is this? What happened to your 'good times sexy high'?"

Stiles snorts, and Derek preens when he relaxes a little and his lashes sweep up along with his gaze, to meet Derek's in the mirror. Derek waits, lets his eyebrows maintain his query, and Stiles quickly gives in.

"I—" he has to stop and clear his throat, words are still foreign things. But Derek is patient, and just strokes up and down his arms, waiting. "—feel bad about... getting, um, distracted like this when Scott is—" he trails off.

Derek sighs and fiddles with Stiles' collar for a moment, twisting it until the triskele dangles, perfectly framed in the hollow of Stiles' throat. He presses his finger against a plump mole just to the left of it. "You can't." He pauses, because talking about this isn't easy for him. "I learned this the hard way, okay. You can't. You have to take some time for good things. It's not... *disrespectful*. There's nothing constructive you can do right now to find Scott. And," he slides both hands across Stiles' chest, pulling him tightly into an embrace, looking over his shoulder into the reflection of soft brown eyes, "what do you think Scott would say if he knew what you just did? Really."

Stiles is quiet for a moment before he huffs. “We’d totally be high-fiving.” His entire body relaxes, and Derek sighs in relief to feel pliancy rather than rigidity in his arms.

“Yeah,” he agrees. “That sounds pretty accurate.”

They’ve got just over five minutes before they have to go. “Do you want binding,” Derek asks. He touches Stiles forearm, and then his chest. “I can do that real quick, if you think it will help.”

Stiles doesn’t hesitate. “God, yes. Yes.” He turns and offers both his forearms, and Derek wonders if that’s because he can more easily fidget with the knots there than if it’s around his torso. He quickly works the ropes he’d grabbed from the drawer into a pattern of diamonds around the slender limbs, and Stiles relaxes even more when he finishes.

“Thanks.”

Chapter End Notes

** This entire chapter can be credited to TheMuller's thoughtful comments on Stiles' agency from waaay back in Ch. 16. Shut *up*, you: look what you made me do. **

Oh! Also, I just finished [mommymuffin](#)'s epic series [Breathe Me](#), which I totally should have read years ago, it's been on my list for a long time. If you're jonesing for a long Sterek with angst, panic attacks, kidnapping, violence, whoa magic and a blood bond wolf, then this is the story for you. (I'd rate it a hard T or soft M for sex and a definite M for violence.) And if you want even more, [wildamongwolves](#) made [a post](#) (and I've read almost none of them, hooray!) that I added a bunch of recs to.

Chris and John smexytimes (old people bj)

Chapter Notes

Oh, *this* chapter. I wrote it months ago, after a long, brutal dry spell. I find that I often fall back on porn to overcome writer's block, and in this case, it featured John and Chris. I don't really know if this scene has a place in this story or if it actually *does* stick out like a sore thumb, but it broke me free from almost half a year of staring nervously at my draft as the cushion between what was written and what was posted got smaller and smaller, and no new material magically appeared. If you're not into Chris and John, you can skip this without missing anything vital. If you are, or if you're unsure, I invite you to spy on a nice sex scene between two older, experienced people. (I actually really had fun with their confidence and experience, it makes them such a nice foil to Stiles and Derek.) I hope it's not too rambling.

Meanwhile, yesterday I was *so* inspired, and wrote an entire chapter, 46. I'm *so close to finishing!!!* Holy cow, I just broke the 150k word ceiling. I'm so frikkin' *verbose*.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

John knocks loudly on the door, ignoring the somewhat ostentatious bell lit beside it. Footsteps soon approach, with a significant pause in which he assumes he's being checked out through the peephole. He waits, calm under the perusal, standing straight, hands behind his back.

A chain rattles, followed by the snicks of several bolts being shot back. Chris Argent opens the door, and appears to be tucking a weapon in the back of his pants before he extends his hand to the Sheriff. "Hello, John," he says, brisk. His eyes are an icy blue that shine warmly at him in spite of their cool hue. Chris smiles: it's small, presents more on the right than the left, as if he doesn't want to commit himself, but it rearranges his face into a roadmap of amiable lines which, combined with his distinctly downturned eyes, gives him the appearance of a friendly basset hound.

John can't help but smile back, although he's here for a serious reason. Chris is ten years younger than he, which still makes him closer to John's generation than Stiles', but the age difference combined with the difference in their dynamic makes John feel a little bit paternal, or... no... doting, perhaps.

"Morning, Chris," he responds, gripping the other man's hand, enjoying the feel of the fingers wrapped in his own. The pair hold on for a beat too long, caught staring at each other. There have been a few stolen kisses over the past few weeks, John allowing Chris to set the pace. Chris is the most self-assured and determined sub he's ever met, and while opening his eyes to a new perspective is painful and often humiliating, John is deeply grateful to have met the man; not just for the taunting swivel of his hips, but also for the standard he demonstrates for Stiles. They have had more than one conversation about what it is to be a male sub, and every time John is humbled by the realization that he'd let his boy down to such an extent, and that he hadn't respected and empowered him nearly as much as he could and should.

But that is not the reason he stands here now. Chris, in spite of his cordial smile, is an intelligent man, and his gaze sweeps over John's uniform, the squad car in the drive, adds it to the fact that it's

mid-morning on a work day and comes up with ‘official business’. He drops John’s hand and steps back, holding the door wider in invitation. His eyebrows slide into their unique wiggly line of interrogation. “What’s going on, John?”

John steps inside and follows as Chris leads the way to the kitchen. “I have something I need to ask you about,” he says, once they are both in the bright room, and Chris has gestured John to take a seat at the bar counter.

Chris freezes for a moment, eyes widened on a short gasp, but recovers quickly. “Okay. Sit down and. Would you like some coffee, before we talk?” he asks.

John snorts, weary. “You see this uniform? It’s like a standing invitation for caffeine.”

Chris smiles briefly. “Cappuccino, espresso, americano...?”

John’s eyebrows go up. “Fancy. I’ll have a latte, then.” He’s quiet while Chris busies himself with a small machine on the counter, giving himself a moment to think. His movements are fluid: even in executing such a domestic task, Chris moves like a dangerous man, focused, capable, nothing superfluous. He’s lean, and only wearing a thin v-necked t-shirt and faded jeans right now, and John can see the well-formed body underneath, as taut and well-proportioned as that of a much younger man. John jumps a little at the shriek of the steamer, but still furtively checks out the denim-hugged ass only a few feet away as Chris pours espresso into two large mugs, drizzles in the steamed milk and then spoons froth over them both. He sets the mugs on the table, along with a shaker of sugar and one of cinnamon.

John uses liberal sugar and flavor, scarcely waits to stir before lifting his mug to drink. It’s too hot, but that’s how John likes it, because he’s been a cop for 30 years now, and coffee is best when mainlined strong and fresh. When he lowers the mug, Chris is smirking at him. John smirks back, undisturbed. “Very nice, thank you,” he says.

Chris leans forward slowly enough that John thinks he’s going to kiss him, but instead he wipes his thumb over the corner of John’s lip, slow and flirtatious. When he pulls away, there’s a dollop of foam on the pad of his thumb. He leaves it there, close to John’s face, and John leans his head down, wrapping his hand around Chris’s wrist to hold it still. “How,” he has to stop and clear his throat. “How messy of me,” he growls. He watches as Chris’s pupils expand and his cheeks turn pink, breathing on the hand he holds before bringing the thumb to his mouth again, closing his lips around the tip and sucking it clean.

Chris jerks a bit, eyes gone totally dark, and makes a little ‘Ah!’ of surprise and sensibility. John sucks at the digit one more time before reluctantly placing Chris’s hand back on his side of the table. He licks his lips, trying to pull his thoughts out of Chris’s pants (and it shouldn’t be so hard, because he’s here on serious business, for god’s sake.) He rubs his fingers against Chris’s palm before putting his hands safely (and unexcitingly) around his own mug once again.

Chris clears his throat, and when he speaks, his voice is stable, although his flush and avid eyes betray the last 30 seconds. “Okay. Talk to me.”

“Scott McCall is missing.” John sighs and relays the few details they have so far: The last time Scott was seen was the end of school Wednesday; Allison had reported that they were going to study together that night; no one saw him at all yesterday; his phone was dead; Derek and Stiles reported that the day before they’d felt edgy and thought it was something to do with the hunters, but couldn’t put their finger on anything specific.

“Fuck,” Chris says feelingly when John finishes. “It has to be the hunters. It would strain coincidence too far to think a third party has suddenly come in.”

John sighs. “We weren’t sure until last night. We’ve done some routine things, but because this situation involves hunters and... wolves... not to mention your daughter, I thought you’d want to help.”

Chris’s eyes narrow. “Of course.” He produces the gun tucked in the back of his pants and pops the magazine. It’s full, of course, and Chris traces its edges with professional surety before sliding it back in. The pad of his finger gleams faintly with gun oil before he wipes it carelessly on a napkin.

“Don’t go vigilante,” John says, and it’s hypocritical, since he and Derek had done exactly that not a few weeks earlier. Chris, who knows it, lifts a brow and his expressive face folds into amused tolerance. “Do you *want* them telling the world about your son and his pack?”

John clenches his teeth. He’s thought of that, of course. The problem with legal pursuit is that people have the right to talk, even after they’re convicted of a crime. Even from jail, these hunters could pick up the phone on any given Saturday and broadcast Stiles’ location, as well as that of Derek and his pack. It’d be an invitation to slaughter, and John would have engraved it. He casts his eyes down, sick with it, hating being backed into a corner like this, after a lifetime dedicated to following the law, to letting the system take its glacial course. But he cannot risk the life of his son against it. Especially after the shitshow he’s experienced recently: it can’t happen again, and frankly, John doesn’t think the justice system can impose an appropriate deterrent... or punishment... against the instigators.

When he looks up again, Chris is standing next to him, hand on his shoulder, gun tucked away once more. “We’ll keep them safe,” he says quietly.

John just nods. He takes a last gulp before pushing his chair back and standing up himself. “I just wanted to let you know, so you could use your contacts, find out what you can. I’m going to the high school next, the principal has arranged for me to meet with the kids in about an hour. Do you object if I ask Allison about when she last saw Scott?”

“Of course not.” Chris moves to a cabinet and takes out for-real cardboard to-go coffee cups, pouring John’s drink into it and handing it over with a faint smile. He walks John to the door and stops him just before he opens it to leave. “I’ll call you as soon as I find anything out,” he says. “And if you want an extra pair of eyes while you search, I’m always available.”

John shifts his coffee to his left hand and brushes the backs of his fingers along Chris’s long waist. “I’ll want you,” he says, voice husky.

Chris slides closer, until one foot is between John’s, the other just to the right. He’s only a couple of inches shorter than John is, but it is sufficient that his face is tilted appealingly upward when they’re at such a close distance. “You say you have an hour before you have to be there?”

John’s heart starts pounding. “That gives me about 45 minutes free –”

Chris edges closer, until their clothes touch, without the pressure of bodies behind it, a teasing sensation. His pale blue eyes disappear momentarily in a slow blink, and John stares mesmerized at his short, sandy lashes. The stubble on his jaw is liberally laced with gray, and it catches the morning light and glows. When he glances up at John again, he’s sultry. “Want to take control?”

John's breath hitches. "You offering?" He slides his hand around Chris's waist, little finger skimming the band of his jeans, bumping over the squared edges of the gun in his pants, which, fuck, is possibly the sexiest thing John's seen or thought of in a good ten years. Chris flows bonelessly against him when John tugs him that last centimeter, until their bodies are chest to chest, hip and thigh and belly.

Chris makes a small sound, soft and low, and lets John bend his body back, overbalance him until his weight lies heavily on the one arm John has wrapped around him. Everything about his face is so mobile, John wonders, so expressive; and soft pink lips beckon, damp and sensuous. Feet tangled, half of Chris's weight trustingly given over to John's grip, John feels centered and *hungry*. He rumbles at Chris, dipping his head to nip along his jaw, teeth and lips running through yesterday's stubble until he chances on that enticing mouth and plants himself there, sucking and pulling. Chris's lips are as eloquent as the rest of his features, coming alive under John's, actively participating, holding on to him, opening in blatant invitation, beguiling his entry. The chest held against his own vibrates with pleased hums and moans, and an unabashed erection presses against him, sinuously thrusting through barriers of denim and khaki until John fears he might be leaking through his pants.

There's a small foyer table nearby, and John blindly sets his cup on it, quickly turning back to get both hands on Chris. His shirt is worn thin enough to feel the whipcord muscle through the fabric. Such strength and danger submitting to his hands is an incredible high. He twists one hand into Chris's hair – just long enough to tangle his fingers in – and pulls his head back, biting at his chin, the vulnerable skin under his jaw, sucking at the tendon guarding the hollow between his clavicles. Chris shudders, and a small whine escapes him. The weight against John's supporting arm grows heavier, and John can feel Chris giving over more control.

He takes it, pushing Chris down to his knees on the polished wooden floor. He scratches his nails through graying hair, hard enough to sting. It's so different doing this with a man, because John isn't worried about going too hard, or too far, about *hurting him*. He'd had plenty of experience with female subs before Claudia, and had always considered them delicate, too easy to break. But Chris.

"Stop me if I do anything you don't want," John says, ragged.

Chris, whose eyes are already dazed and glossy, looks the long, long way back up and smirks a little. He abruptly produces the gun from his waistband, spins it in a neat circle around his forefinger and vanishes it again. "I'm good," he answers, and his voice is very deep, slurred with desire. He rubs his hands up and down the outsides of John's thighs, head tilting back down to stare at the pants before him, bulging with John's erection.

The confident intimation that he can take care of himself inflames John further, and he spreads his feet a little to solidify his stance. He quickly unfastens his duty belt and lays it on the little table next to his coffee, trying to be sure not to scratch it with his gun, walkie talkie and all the other numerous accoutrements it holds.

"Undo my pants," he commands. "Take me out."

Chris drops a hand to squeeze himself before nimbly attacking John's belt, flicking the button and sliding down the zip. In spite of being ten years senior, John's body is as lean as it was decades earlier, an unsought side effect of his son's obsession with healthy foods combined with rigorous physical workouts. Chris hums as he trails his fingers down John's thighs, more or less following

the pants as they drop from the weight of the belt. He comes back to the waistband of John's underwear and looks up, waiting.

"Take 'em down," John says, stern, and Chris's eyes seem to roll back in his head a little, reacting to the command, and John wants to growl like a wolf when he sees it, this generally suppressed display of Chris's dynamic. "That's right," he says softly, when Chris has both layers down around his knees and waits, eyes fixed on John's cock, which is pointing straight at his face. John has the urge to flex his hips, to nudge his cock forward until it hits Chris's lips, until it slips to the side and moves along his cheek, leaving a gleaming trail of precome through stubble. He wants to see Chris tip his head back, present his face so that John can just lay his cock right across it, from chin to forehead, rut gently over nose and brow and watch Chris's expression of bliss grow, nourished with these gestures of domination.

But this is the first time they've progressed beyond kissing, and John will keep it tame for now. They have limited time, anyway.

"Very good," he gently kicks Chris's hand away from his own crotch. "You may not touch yourself." He pauses a moment, thinking. "You may not touch me, either. Hands clasped behind your back."

Chris bites his lip and does as he's told. The position pushes his chest out, emphasizes the line of his shoulders, the curve of his neck, and John sucks in a sharp breath at the sight. "Good," he says. "No speaking unless you need to tell me to stop, okay? Red, yellow, green alright with you?" Chris shivers, and visible goosebumps scatter across his chest and arms as he nods. John reaches down to stroke himself, avid at the picture kneeling before him. "No touching. Only your lips and your mouth. Open your mouth, Chris."

Chris does, and looking at this lethal man, submitting between his knees, mouth open to the tip of his cock is *obscene*, and John's painted the man's lips with the slick gleam of precome before he's rational again. "Lick," he says. "No sucking right now. Show me what you've got."

Chris does not disappoint. He uses his whole body as he licks, the flicks of his tongue across such sensitive skin are in no way tentative. His tongue darts, teases, laves in turns, covers all territory: the shaft – inducing a warm, heavy arousal with each touch; the head – eliciting sharp, knife-edged shocks of pleasure with each swipe; the sac that hangs behind. And while the feeling of pleasure in his balls is duller, uninstituted by simple licks, the sight of Chris, nestling his face under John's cock to get to it is enough to make heat swallow him whole, flaring under his skin from his chest to his ears, and he groans. It is one time he's grateful for his years, because it will help him not to go off too soon.

He grabs Chris by the jaw and pulls him roughly away, caught in the shining residue he has left across the man's cheekbone, the reddening of his lips. "Very nice," he says. "I'll let you do that again sometime. But right now I'm ready for you to suck me. No hands. Show me how good you are."

Chris glances up, almost lazy, before he focuses again on John's groin. This time he starts on his testicles, breathing deeply before pulling one and then the other into his mouth, sucking hard, tonguing them rhythmically. John grunts, throws one hand to the side to prop himself against the wall, keeps the other clenched around the back of Chris's head. He widens his legs further to give him more access.

Time melts into a slurry of fevered sensation, always with Chris in the center: the only thing in focus are pale blue eyes, the determination on his face to do his best, to show how good he can be. John's fingers slide here and there, through hair, around jaw, inside his mouth to feel how his tongue curls around John's cock, pulling away just to watch saliva spill, to make this man messy and dirty and flushed and wanting.

He takes a step closer, crosses the line of Chris's body, catching his head as he nearly falls backwards. His cock is still buried in his mouth and John lets go the wall to cradle Chris's skull in both hands. "Will you be alright if I fuck your face?" he breathes.

Chris closes his eyes on a moan and nods as much as he's able, loosening his jaw in invitation. He sags, letting John take his weight, hold his head still, supporting and guiding.

"Don't move," John mutters. "Just take it." He starts to pump, slowly at first, watching to see how deep he can go before Chris shows discomfort. Chris lets him straight into the back of his throat without flinching, but John watches another wave of goosebumps flow across his skin. He drops his pinky down to rub the base of Chris's throat, tug the collar of his shirt to see a little more collarbone, a small tuft of hair.

And then he settles for an earnest fuck. God, that mouth. Wet and hot and *busy*, so busy, because while the rest of Chris is slack, his tongue twists and curls touching John's length as much as possible, quick and narrow and *present*. And John's got him between his hands, has his cock *right there*, watch it, pumping in and out of that red mouth, and there's a spill of saliva that John can scoop with his thumb, rub along lip and chin. There are eyes clenched shut in concentration, lashes growing damp with the effort. But Chris doesn't let that put tension in his body, no, god, he's so fucking good for his Dom, remains lax in his hands, trusting and eager and deliciously experienced.

John takes another step forward, so that Chris is nearly back at an uncomfortable angle, but there he moans with appreciation, shuddering in John's grip, body jolting with each thrust, hands politely and obediently locked at the small of his back, limp over the gun hidden there. And that, that is the last thought John has before he feels his orgasm swell up within him, a steamy effusion that fills his body clear to fingertips and toes before pulsing out in long streams that Chris swallows straight down, moaning as if it's the best tasting thing ever, and god *damn*, fuck, that's hot, that's so hot, and John feels a little wild, a lot amazed, and exhilaratingly overwhelmed with their first sexual encounter, like he's made of fire, and stone.

He pulls away as soon as he comes back to himself, although there were no complaints from Chris, who still lies pliant in his grasp. His penis drops free, dragging down Chris's lower lip, and Chris lifts heavy eyelids, head twitching minutely in the cup of John's hands. His lips stay open for a second, as if all signals are being delayed, breath slow and deep, tongue languid in the mess that is his mouth.

John drops to one knee and guides Chris to fall back further, until he's stretched out on the floor, front door right there at his head. John straightens his legs so they're bent in front of him rather than underneath. "I want to touch you everywhere," he rasps. "Is that a problem?"

Chris smirks and shakes his head. John focuses on his jeans, bulging with the girth of his erection. He runs his hands under the t-shirt, pushing it up and up and up again, feeling muscle and bone pass under his palms until he has a clear view of Chris's chest. He pulls the man's arms from behind his back and puts them above his head giving Chris a firm look as he does so, knowing his order will be understood, *Don't move*. He pushes the shirt a little higher. There. There is the

hollow of his throat that had so taunted him. The two knobs of collarbone, the gentle swell of well-maintained pectorals, the soft suggestion of sandy hair under his arms, mostly concealed by bunched up cloth.

John lets his hands wander for a bit. Just brushing up some warmth, some pink into his skin. Chris is rocking his hips infinitesimally, probably unaware, seeking the only friction he can gain in this position. John clucks his tongue and puts a hand full on the line of Chris's cock. He looks up. "I'll take care of you," he says.

Without further exploration, he opens Chris's jeans, pulls them and his underwear down to nearly his knees. His cock springs out, deep red and bouncing, centered in sharp, narrow hips. His balls are already drawn tight, indicating that he's close to orgasm already, mostly untouched. John touches here, too, both hands dragging down from rib to hip, framing his cock and sliding around it, tangling briefly in hair before reaching hardened thighs that betray Chris's exigency with visible shivers.

"I'm only going to blow you," John says absently, staring. Chris is faintly tan even below his navel, and a few of the hairs tracking down to his pubis are gray. He wraps his hands around Chris's thighs and encourages them upwards, curling him over his belly, caught up in his pants. There is his ass, similarly pale gold, shaped with the musculature of a habitual runner. And there is his hole, exposed now between his cheeks, brown and clenching as John stares.

"Only going to blow you, because I don't have much time. But Chris," he rises a little on his knees, looks over Chris's doubled over legs and the gathering of denim, down at his face, flushed and dreamy. "Chris. I want you to *think* about being fucked. Think about me fucking you, and how that would feel. When my mouth is on you. Want you to wonder—"

John more or less loses track at this point, drawn down to Chris's cock, nosing his head between upraised thighs to coax it up, slurp it into John's mouth. He grabs Chris's pants with one hand, uses the wadded fabric to push Chris's legs further up, lifting his ass and hiding his face. He slides his free hand around to Chris's mouth, pumps his thumb in and out a few times, feels Chris liberally coating it with saliva: he knows what's coming, and John holds him steady with his denim handhold, moves his mouth up and down the shaft, retrieves his thumb and rubs it on Chris's hole. John's not a stranger to assholes, he knows how they work.

So he sucks, and he rubs, and the angle is awkward, but he can be patient. He sinks in his thumb, finds Chris's prostate after a long minute. He holds him down hard, keeps him from squirming away when he hits it, circles around the gland instead of nailing it dead-on, doesn't want to *hurt* the man, god no, just wants to give 'im pleasure, lick and swallow and push into him until he's sticky with sweat and moaning with every exhale, until his body throbs with the thundering of his heart. So he does, until Chris goes rigid, overcome with his release, and now John sucks it all out of him, swallows it down accompanied by Chris's incredulous shout and full-bodied shivers.

Chris tastes bitterandsalt, just as he should, and the smell of him is warm and tangy and John has a blinking moment when he wonders what this would be like if he had heightened senses like has been described to him about werewolves, but he lets it slip away, because all he wants to think about right now is Chris, the little aftershocks that tremor his body, pulse him around John's carefully withdrawing thumb, ravage him when John pulls his mouth free and releases his hold so that Chris can drop his legs.

He falls to one hand, propped next to Chris's shoulder, and stares down at him. "God that was good," he murmurs. He dips down for a kiss, and Chris obliges, is more docile now than active, allows John to eclipse him, own his mouth, hand wandering across his chest and abdomen, each stroke tugging him a little closer.

They lie there for a little while, each catching his breath. John is patient, and too experienced to leap up from an impromptu scene without the caretaking that both of them crave. He hauls Chris up after a while, grumbling about old hips and wooden floors, straightens and fastens both their pants before pushing Chris onto the sofa in a keeping room off the kitchen. Chris blinks at him, opens his mouth, but John just humphs and turns away. He washes his hands before he nukes Chris's coffee, brings it to him and then sits down close by. As he had hoped, Chris leans in, and John wraps both arms around him, nosing through his hair, hands wandering in a calming way, now.

They kind of hum back and forth, murmuring but not actually using words. It's calm and relaxing. Chris politely shares his drink, which is less sweet than John usually takes it, but that somehow makes it better, just because Chris is *sharing* with him, rather than serving him, and that makes the Dom inside him preen.

They can only sit for ten minutes or so before John looks at his watch and sighs. "It's time for me to go." He tugs Chris's head back and drops a soft kiss on his lips, pulls back enough to watch his thumb trace a cheekbone. "That was amazing, Chris."

Chris smiles at him, lazy and sultry, losing a little of the subspace pliancy and edging towards cocky once again. He slides a sidelong look at John's neck, where, fuck, John puts up a hand, is he going to have a hicky? He mock glares, and Chris laughs, standing up and pushing him toward the door. "Then let's do it again soon," Chris says. John buckles on his utility belt and grins, walking up to Chris until he's got him pinned against the wall. He goes for one last kiss, and it goes on and on, god, they're necking like *teenagers*, John thinks, sucking one last bite into the skin under Chris's ear.

"I look forward to it," John says, scooping up his cold coffee, because what the fuck does he care if it's hot or not.

Once outside the door, though, he's serious again. John has lived long enough to know that you take your joy where you can, and you don't feel guilty about it – that sometimes it's more necessary and meaningful in the darkest hours than it ever is when everyone is free and happy, so he doesn't let it bother him that they had this interlude while Scott is missing. He'll be at the next point in his investigation in plenty of time, nothing lost. "Call your contacts. Let me know if you learn anything, okay Chris?"

Chris is evidently also no stranger to stepping from languor to duty. He nods briskly. "I'll talk to Derek, too. And tonight, we go hunting."

John swallows the thrill he gets, watching Chris's face go hard and dangerous, his voice dropping low and gravely when he says that. He nods and turns away, dropping himself back into the cracked pleather seat of his squad car and turning his mind towards the school.

Full solar eclipse coming next week, for those of us in the right places in the US, and I hope you get to enjoy it. My family and I are traveling a couple hours north so we'll be in its direct path. I'M SO EXCITED!

Oh, hey, two things. First is, do you think this chapter should just be a separate story? Second, and much more important, I've been meaning to ask if someone had a better summary for this story than the one I've got? Summaries aren't my strong point (possibly because I write them before I have any idea where the story is going, lol), and it's been mentioned by a few people that they almost didn't read this because the summary turned them off. I'm not particularly attached to the one I've got, I just whipped it up on the day I posted the first chapter, so, if you've got any suggestions... .

Tick, Tock – All Together Now (all come together)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Attending school feels vaguely obscene to Stiles. He drifts through dragging minutes, eyes absently tracing the second hand of each class's cheap, battery-run clock as it ticks, its click and whirr abrasive and somehow noisier than the drone of whatever teacher is talking under it. *Tick, tick, tick.* Stiles twitches and fidgets, although Derek leans heavily on his leg to keep him calm. When that doesn't work, when Stiles' fingers thump on the table before digging into the papers in front of him, Derek lifts his upper body enough to wrap his jaws around Stiles' forearm, and Stiles comes back into himself with a jolt. Derek mouths at his sleeve, glaring at him under wolfy brows that are just as expressive as his human ones. *We discussed this just this morning*, he's clearly saying. *This is what your binding is for.*

Thus redirected, Stiles scrunches up his face before slipping his fingers up under his sleeve. And there they are, criss-crossed ropes. If he flexes his wrist, he can feel them, gently pushing into his skin. They're not too tight, but they're firm enough to leave marks on him, textured dents in the pattern of carefully arranged lines; Stiles knows this, that the marks on his skin will be a slightly brighter red than the dull crimson of the ropes themselves.

Derek relaxes next to him as he rubs his forefinger across the hemp; he can shut his eyes and see the back of Derek's head, as he bent over his task, focused and sure, rope sliding sensually through his fingers as he twisted it around and over Stiles' arm. Some times, and today in particular, Stiles feels like exploding – into action, into screaming, into pieces – and he likes the idea of the bindings holding him together. Even if they're literally only from wrist to elbow, they feel bigger than their mere physical presence. (Sort of like Derek, if he thinks about it.)

This gets him through until lunch, and he rather listlessly shuffles from the cafeteria line to their table, wondering why he bothered with the food at all: today's menu is 'grilled' chicken and greens, and everything is so slimy and overcooked he knows he won't touch anything except for the cardboard-based chocolate chip cookie provided for dessert.

Boyd, Isaac and Erica are only minutes behind him, each looking ruefully at their own tray as well: this is possibly the worst lunch this week, and Stiles makes a note to himself (as he does every week) that he needs to start packing lunches. Cecily seems to still be absent, which bothers Stiles, and he wishes he had a number to call, to be sure she's alright. Maybe her medical treatment isn't going well, and he fidgets, worrying.

He smells them before he sees them, and heard them long before that, so he's unsurprised at the crisp tap of Lydia's heels, the soft stride of Allison's boots, Jackson's 'cool-guy' shuffle, accompanied by a cloud of fresh green monkshood, Chanel No. 5, Axe and lacrosse leather.

"Hi Stiles," Allison says quietly. She slides her tray onto the table just at the end of their little group, next to Boyd and kitty-corner from Stiles, and gives him a hesitant smile. She's never approached him at lunch before, usually only comfortable doing it when Scott is around as a buffer, or an excuse. Lydia sinks into the space next to her, and Jackson stands there for a long moment, looking very confused, because *why are they suddenly sitting with this group of social rejects, what*

the fuck is going on, should he stay with his girlfriend or go to their regular table regardless, so as not to tarnish his shiny reputation.

Stiles stifles his instinct to cringe away, although he can do nothing about the rigidity of his posture. He makes an effort and grins nastily at the struggle implicit in Jackson's constipated expression. Next to him, Derek growls softly before glancing at Allison, who obviously has something to say, and then allowing the intrusion. Lydia turns around and gives her boyfriend a *look*, and he plops down beside her, immediately turning his eyes away as though by ignoring them he can pretend he isn't really there.

"I talked to your father today," Allison continues. Lydia, next to her, radiates fierce curiosity that adds warm notes of sandalwood and patchouli to the disquieting sweet musk of her perfume. "He says – he says they haven't found Scott yet." She reaches out and grabs Lydia's hand, for comfort, which makes Stiles' eyebrows lift in surprise... he hadn't realized the two were *that* close. Jackson sees it too, and rolls his eyes.

Stiles shrugs in response, and twists his mouth into a sad grimace. Dad had come and talked to him and his pack as well, after second period, during which all of the pack had struggled to contain their shock at the way the Sheriff had smelled of come and sexual repletion, because, *whoa*. And Stiles could discern that it was Chris Argent (the greenhouse aconite a dead giveaway, with dirt and fertilizer as well as wolfsbane-infused gunpowder.) Stiles was of two minds about it. The first was shock and disgust: *Dad, he's a hunter. And also, he's not-mom.* But on the other hand, *Way to go Dad, look at you, getting laid on a Monday morning, like the slick operator you are.* And Chris. Chris!

Stiles kind of likes Chris, in spite of his profession and affiliations. He's a sub without a collar, and he's indisputably *badass*, and unabashedly strong, and Stiles is so *relieved* to know that such a combination is possible... and (as of this morning) demonstrably desirable. To see someone who has successfully lived this way for *years* is... deeply satisfying. As is seeing his father – quietly lonely in his widowhood – finding someone he can relate to, confide in. Someone who can do for him the things that Stiles has always striven to do, but couldn't because of his age and his role as a child.

Of course, they'd had nothing to report that John didn't already know, but it was reassuring to see how thorough he was being, taking his job as Sheriff seriously and leaving no stone unturned. Because, Scott.

Stiles darts a glance at Lydia and Jackson and feels his throat stiffen, locked tight. There will be no words today. Fuck no. He pulls his pad out of his bag and scrawls, ***Scott is still missing. No leads.*** ***We think it's probably the same people who took me.*** He slides it over, and Lydia shamelessly reads over Allison's shoulder. The uric burn of fear saturates the table when Allison read this, and her heartbeat skyrockets.

"Do you –" her voice is thin, because she can't take a deep enough breath to support it. "Do you think they're. Hurting him. Like they. Like you –"

Stiles doesn't even want to know how much she knows about that. She must have heard something from her father, because she and Scott had seen him bruised, but hadn't seen the worst of his injuries, and they'd never talked about it. (*Talked*, heh.) He swallows hard and tries to relax his fists. He ignores Lydia's calculating observance and glances down at Derek, who gazes back

calmly, before taking the pad back and writing, ***He's not a sub.*** (And how he *hates* writing such a thing, because it makes *sub* sound like an insult, and it shouldn't. It *shouldn't*.)

Allison reads it, but slides a contemplative look over at Derek, eyebrows slightly raised, and Stiles knows that she knows that Derek was tortured as well. But he's not about to write down, especially under Lydia's inquisitive nose, that Scott isn't an Alpha... or even a werewolf. He tries to express that with his face, but he's not sure how well that goes over, although Lydia's interest is growing sharper and sharper with each minute of 'conversation'. Jackson finishes his potatoes and grabs Lydia's cookie off her tray and she stabs him in the hand with a fork without even looking over. Stiles snorts. So does Erica.

Isaac and Stiles are across from each other, with Derek between them at the end of the table, where Cecily usually parks her wheelchair. He offers his cookie shyly down the table, head bent down, but eyes looking sidelong at both Lydia and Jackson. "Here," he says. "You can have mine, I don't want it." Stiles can't tell if he's offering it to Lydia or Jackson, and shoots him a confused look before checking to see what Derek does. Derek rests his furry head on the table and smiles a very *fang*-ful smile at Jackson, who draws his hand back quickly. Lydia reaches across Boyd and accepts the cookie.

"Why thank you, Isaac," she says. Her voice softens, as do her eyes, and she lets her fingers touch his for a moment. Stiles smells no lust, no attraction, only a certain shy pleasure from Isaac and from Lydia a gentle kind of approval, as that of a Dom well pleased with their sub. He remembers Derek's calm certainty that she's a Domme, and this really cements it for him. Although he *does* wonder why she's so nice to Isaac when she's never been nice to him before (that he knows of). Does this mean that Isaac, even unproclaimed, is a better sub than he is? He knows his scent sours a little at the thought (not that he cares what Lydia thinks about him *anyway*), and Derek swings his head to the side to press it against his arm, licking the back of his hand and giving him a look that not only expresses affection but also says, quite clearly, *For godssake, Stiles, what does this even matter?*

Stiles swallows hard and shakes it off. He pulls the note back from Allison. ***We're going to work on it this afternoon,*** he writes. ***Maybe Dad can track his phone, even though it's dead. We'll get him back.***

"Can I – may I come help?"

Stiles looks at his pack before looking back at Allison and nodding.

Erica, who is sitting directly across from her, reaches out and pats Allison on the hand. "We'll meet up at Stiles' after school," she says, kindly. *What? Erica being kindly? What alternate reality is this?*

At Derek's prodding, Stiles lifts a bite of rubbery chicken to his mouth and chews. (And chews, and chews. Ugh. Food.) His sleeve slips towards his elbow, and although he's quick to tug it back up, covering the ropes criss-crossed around his arm, he can see Lydia watching, filing everything away in that dynamic brain she's always trying to hide.

The remainder of lunch passes in surreal, stilted chatter between Allison, Erica, Lydia and Isaac. Boyd, Stiles and Jackson remain silent... all for different reasons, Stiles is sure. The day drags on after that, and Stiles keenly feels Scott's absence in history class, the empty chair next to him blaring worry and desperation into his head. He can't stop thinking about Allison's question. *Will they hurt him like they did you?* God, he hopes not. Stiles is proudly atheist, but he's praying

inside. Not to a god, no. Just a plea thrown out into the ether, because he cannot stop himself from it. *Please, please let Scott be okay. Don't let them hurt him.* And he has flashes of a knife dripping blood, of a whip, of clenched fists and his own gasps of pain, of Derek's inhuman growls and agonized shouts. His heart starts skipping, and his breaths speed up.

Derek pushes up to grasp his arm in his teeth again, eyes sharp on his own. *Use your bindings, Stiles.* So Stiles twists his fingers in the thin rope, pulling hard to feel it cut into his skin below the knobs of his wrist, reminding him that the world is small, that it *can* be controlled sometimes, that there is someone with him who can help break it down into manageable pieces. He feels his bond with his mate in his chest, warm and reassuring, fiercely protective and radiating strength. The pups are there as well, much more subtle, mildly worried (more for him than for Scott, he knows, since they have no real connection to his friend.) But it all helps, keeping him from the precipice of a panic attack.

Yet he is never quite able to let it go, and the day is interminable. He wants to go home, needs to be somewhere safe where he can absorb, adapt, plan. The chaos at school, the din of a thousand heartbeats, all the whispering and scuffling, the squeal of chairs, the reek of bodies and perfume and hormones: he can't *think*. And Scotty needs him, has always needed him.

Scott doesn't do so well on his own. It's the one of the reasons they've remained such stable friends, even after Stiles presented as a sub. Scott is the most easy-going, laid-back Dom Stiles has ever known, just laughing and compliant when Stiles steers him in one direction or another, always so breezily nonchalant when Stiles tells him to stuff it, or that he's doing something stupid. Stiles *needs* that. Derek and the new pack are wonderful, but there's a place in his heart and in his life that can never be filled by anyone but Scott, because they're *brothers* as well as best friends. *Scott, Scott, Scott,* his heart mourns. *I'm coming. We'll find you. We won't let them hurt you. We're going to find you.*

As soon as he pulls in his driveway, Stiles leaps so eagerly out of his Jeep that he very nearly faceplants. Derek is close enough on his heels that he can leap forward a little, position himself for Stiles to prop up on as he staggers back into balance. They're alone, for a moment, since the pack has the Camaro, running back to the loft for a bit before they'll all convene here, so he doesn't have to worry about any witnesses. He's inside the door and in the kitchen in a flash, dropping his bookbag on the counter and then leaning on it, so filled with relief to be away from school, to be in the quiet, the familiar smells of his house.

Derek wheezes as he stretches and shakes, releasing the tension that he maintains throughout the school day, always on alert. Stiles bends down to unlatch his vest and lead, scratching his fingers through thick fur, behind Derek's ears, across his shoulders, fluffing a pelt that had gone flat under the nylon vest. Derek licks him from collarbone up to his forehead, and Stiles snorts and jerks away, standing up again. "Gross," he says, pleased that his voice is less rusty than it has been. (Baby steps, Stiles.)

Derek shakes his body and then morphs from wolf to man; Stiles hardly winces at the grind of bone and twang of shifting tendons. Now, here Derek is in front of him, acres of uninterrupted fair skin gleaming in the slanted light of the afternoon, and Stiles' mouth goes dry at the sight.

"Well, hullo there, handsome," he croaks. "Didn't want to wait to get to the bedroom?"

Derek rolls his eyes at him and then stretches, much like he had as a wolf, loosening his human muscles as well. Stiles stares unabashedly, even sneaking the occasional brave peek at his sex, pink and soft, swaying gently with the movement of his body. (*He's had his hands on that!*) Derek's eyes are closed, and he pulls each elbow behind his head before extending both arms up overhead, pushing his fingertips against the ceiling. Stiles is both fascinated and envious of the way Derek manages to take up space. Height-wise, they're much the same, and yet Derek seems infinitely more massive, his height, his wingspan, the breadth and depth of him, all of it confident in its boundaries and its power.

Stiles finds he's wandered quite close during his lascivious evaluation. Derek drops his arms and looks down at him (how does he *do* that, with scarcely an inch advantage???), face passive but eyes gently smiling. Stiles breathes deep, absorbing the unique scent of him, heavy warm notes of loam, the cool clean tint of a breeze, the faint, pleasant sting of pine, a rough, animal note from his hours as a wolf. He leans forward to rub his own scent in there as well, the olfactory equivalent of tousling up a neatly coiffed hair-do. He rubs his mouth along Derek's neck, the sharp cut of the tendon there, until he's nosing under an ear, both palms pressed against Derek's warm chest.

Derek grumbles in much the same way he does as a wolf, before settling into a low, soothing growl. Stiles purrs in response, beginning to lose himself in the high of his Alpha's scent, the way his hands close over Stiles' shoulder blades, holding him close, the way Derek dips his own head to stroke his face along Stiles' neck, reflecting the ritual.

They're interrupted by a sharp rap on the window of the kitchen door, *ratatatattat*. Stiles leaps about a foot into the air with an embarrassing little shriek and jerks his head to the side to see Danny Mahaleani, Lydia and Jackson staring through the window at him with varying expressions of astonished-but-intrigued embarrassment (Danny), lewd consideration (Lydia), and boredom (Jackson).

Chapter End Notes

Does this count as a cliffhanger? :)

I was on a dragon kick this past week, that and dragonriders, so here are a few recs for you:

Secret hoard by Nival_Vixen Teen. 10k. Everyone knows that a dragon needs a hoard, and without one, the dragon will die. None of Stiles' friends know what his hoard is, and they're all worried that he doesn't have one. // In the village below the dragons' mountains, werewolves live with humans, and Derek Hale is curious to know more about the dragons. He just doesn't expect one to fall from the sky.

{Heh. Stiles is just as clumsy as a dragon as he is as a human, which means he falls under Derek's care for a little while. ... Stiles and his secrets.}

We Fit So Neatly by skoosiepants Teen. 5k. When Stiles is thirteen years old, he falls in love. // She's over ten feet tall, with gray-green leathery skin and a plump, yellow belly, bright purple eyes and an ungainly wingspan that makes her topple when she spreads them open too wide. // In the time it takes for the dragon to bury her too-warm muzzle in the palm of his

hand, Stiles knows he wants to spend the rest of his life with her. // Her handler is gruff, dark-haired, wide-shouldered, and scowling down at him. He's got a burn scar running down the outside of one forearm, and the flight vest open at his throat reveals an angry red claw mark on his collarbone. // Stiles maybe falls a little bit in love with him, too.

[**my wings a hurricane**](#) by kellifer_fic Teen. 20k. Stiles had been like any other kid growing up in the era of dragons. He'd watched the cartoons, the news stories, had the lunch box. When his screening at Beacon Hills High had come up negative, he'd been disappointed but unsurprised. His positive results were returned three years too late for it to be in any way convenient or cool. // Or, the one where they ride dragons.

[**Stiles Stilinski and the Societas Draconistrarum**](#) by Green Explicit. 25k. Stiles becomes a Host for a dragon symbiote under difficult circumstances, then has to learn to live with her in his head. Meanwhile, there's a secret society after him at the same time the Alpha pack threatens everyone in town.

[**Spark**](#) by rispacooper Mature. 10k. Derek had never actually seen Stiles in his full dragon form. If he was being honest with himself, he wasn't sure he wanted to. The first time Derek had properly met Stiles, spoken with him, he'd had a hard time not reacting to the heat of him, far too reminiscent of the lick of flames at Derek's skin. Dragons exuded heat, Derek had known that, intellectually. They might look like cold-blooded reptiles but they were creatures of fire. // Derek did not have good memories of fire. Stiles couldn't have been expected to remember that, but it hadn't helped that he'd focused on Derek with those impossibly wide eyes of lustrous brown and then let out of a puff of marijuana-scented breath and announced he'd take Derek instead of a sandwich.

[**The Long Way Round**](#) by exclamation Explicit. 180k. A magical accident sends Stiles back in time. Now he's stuck in New York, living with Derek and Laura, and the only way to get back to his own time is to learn to use magic. Meanwhile, he must figure out how much he can tell them about their future. Can he warn them about the dangers they face? Can he change his own past? // And can he trust the creature known as Bookworm, who seems to know him better than he knows himself?

Let's Plan Some Shit Y'all (or, Hey, Hey, the Gang... Yadda Yadda)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Derek's heart barely blips at the interruption, and Stiles wonders if he'd heard Lydia's cohort coming. (Stiles himself had *not*, being *a little bit distracted at the time*, okay? Because – naked Derek and his intoxicating smell – that's why. Derek brushes his cheek down Stiles' neck in a drawn-out final caress, one arm slipping down to very deliberately grope his ass before he turns away, smirking. Stiles watches him stride off in a dizzy, open-mouthed vortex of arousal. Derek vanishes up the stairs, presumably to acquire some clothing. Stiles stands and dithers for another long moment, brain stuck on the dawning consideration that Derek may have *intended* for them to be witnessed; his gaze, meanwhile, with no productive thought occurring, is trapped in Lydia's through the glass before he literally jerks back into himself (Well, the jerk is literal. The exiting and reentering his body, not so much.) to realize his hands are gesturing away, without a soundtrack, as it were.

He hauls his wayward arms back in, tucking one underneath the other across his chest, as though to pin them into stasis. He walks over to the door and has the distinct (and humiliating) impression that he's moving like a wounded chicken or something, but he does eventually get the knob turned and the door ajar. He opens his mouth to lecture them on the propriety of sneaking up to people's kitchen doors and getting unwarranted eyefuls of nakedness and necking, but chokes on the words.

"Hi, Stiles," Danny says, looking faintly ashamed and dimpling down at him to mitigate any offense he may be feeling. The righteous fury Stiles has been trying to muster kind of collapses. You can't be mad at that face: Danny (like Allison) looks like all things bright and pure. Not for the first time, Stiles mulls over how on *earth* such a Disney prince can be friends with *Jackson*. (It's just gross and mystifying.) Also, Danny's cheeks are flushed, and his eyes are dilated, and Stiles relishes the sudden sense of smugness that washes over him. *Oh, yeah. You know you wish you were me right now!* ♫♪*You wish you haaad soooome...* ♪♫

Lydia glides in behind Danny, deigning to grace Stiles with a thin smile, Jackson towed in her wake, looking disgruntled and confused.

Stiles narrows his eyes at that affront to all decency and turns to Lydia, jerking his head in Jackson's direction and lifting his eyebrows in the universal pantomime for, 'What the hell is this dickwad doing here?' Upon fuller consideration, he throws his hands out to indicate *all* of them, because, really.

Danny starts to answer, but Lydia, pulling out a chair and seating herself regally into it, interrupts. "Hello, Stiles," she says. She tips her head in command, and Jackson slips into a chair beside her, which makes Stiles take an edgy step back. Danny, considerately, remains still. "We're here to help you find Scott." She blinks her green eyes at him. "I'm sure we'll find him much faster this way than if you do it alone."

Stiles gapes.

Derek prowls back into the kitchen, wearing painted-on black jeans and nothing else... Normally being half naked and barefoot would render one vulnerable, but instead Derek looks half wild,

inexorable. Stiles isn't sure if he's selected such a scanty wardrobe for psychological effect or rather because Derek didn't want to be away for too long with all these unproven, unsolicited people in the house. Certainly he wouldn't have wanted to leave Stiles alone with Jackson. Probably. Definitely.

Danny stares at Derek, and Stiles is fairly sure the boy will start drooling soon, which makes him surge with a bitter roil of jealousy. As if he can feel the sentiment (or, more likely, smell it), Derek moves next to Stiles and pulls him in, wrapping an arm around his shoulder. He rests his fingertips at Stiles' suprasternal notch – the delicate hollow between his collarbones, just below the triskele – and Stiles knows it's a frank gesture to highlight that Stiles *trusts* him. *Belongs* to him. Stiles can sense him making eye contact with each interloper, can smell the dominance in his pheromones.

Lydia leans over slightly and boldly picks up the *Service Dog* vest, letting it dangle from one finger. "Hello, Derek Hale. Decide blue wasn't your color?"

Derek's arm goes rigid, and he looses a low, menacing growl. Stiles glances at him and sees that his irises are shining red, and his eyeteeth have elongated into something it would be difficult *not* to call fangs. He punches Derek in the side, hissing in warning.

Derek stops, but the damage is done. The room explodes in racing heartbeats and the hot-metal scent of adrenaline. Danny and Jackson are rendered in olfactory shades of shock and fear. Lydia looks like she's holding her breath, and she's got a white-knuckled grip on the table, but she doesn't back down, just nods her head. "You aren't very subtle, you know," she says, voice thin and a little shaky, but determined. "I had you figured out the first day you came to school."

She disentangles her fingers from the straps on the vest and lays it on the table. "Only a fool would have taken you for a *dog*," she continues. "Not to mention everyone still called you by your name." She frowns and shakes her head disdainfully at their unsophisticated lack of subterfuge. "And your – followers – have a pretty hard time acting fully *human*." She drops her hands into her lap, then, and Stiles can tell from the flex of muscles in her arms that she's clenching them together; but she swallows hard and bravely – or foolishly – carries on.

"Stiles, you've been different since you got back. I mean, of course. But. You keep *smelling* things. I've been watching you. You sniff the air all the time. And you clearly *hear* things, too. Things no one else can."

Stiles lifts one helpless hand, trying to stop the damning flow of words. Beside him, Derek rumbles warningly.

Lydia follows Stiles' gaze to the two boys that flank her and shakes her head. "They're not going to say anything. None of us are. But I do want to know how you became, what, *shapeshifters*? And I question what this has to do with Scott."

The doorbell rings. Stiles somewhat despairingly puzzles over what on earth has become of his early detection senses. How have so many people snuck up on his house today? He turns toward the living room and then back to the kitchen guests, indecisive. Derek puts his hand on his shoulder, heavy and guiding. "Stay here and watch them," he growls. "I'll get it."

It's only a handful of seconds before the whuff of the opening door gusts the scent of Allison Argent around the corner. Stiles relaxes (such a strange response to the smell of *hunter*) and gratefully escapes the kitchen to scurry up beside Derek. He smiles at Alison and gestures her in (accidentally smacking Derek in the shoulder, but, eh).

"Hi, Derek. Hi, Stiles," Allison says. Derek grunts, but Stiles rolls his eyes at him and jerks a thumb over his shoulder.

"Lydia et al. are in the kitchen," he whispers hoarsely. Allison startles at his voice, the toe of her sneaker catching on the runner at the door and causing her to stumble a little. It's the most graceless Stiles has ever seen her.

"Oh!" she replies. "Um. I didn't tell her *anything*, I swear—"

Stiles shrugs. "Didn't think you did. 'S'ok."

Before they have time to turn around, they're interrupted again. This time, Stiles has a little warning, can hear the Camaro in the distance, and waits at the door until the betas arrive, parking some distance down the street and approaching while curiously checking out Allison's dad's SUV and Jackson's ostentatious Porche.

They bounce up the steps like the puppies they are, and everyone has to pause while Derek scents them and then passes them along to Stiles for the same thing. Feeling generous, he even pulls Allison in for hug, wistfully breathing in the faint scent of Scott that clings to her skin. Allison seems startled, but dimples at him and gives him a long, strong hug in return. "We're going to find him," she whispers, and Stiles nods.

Then there is bustling and murmuring and movement for a while as the various groups go through (mistrustful) greetings and settling and snack-distributing. There are too many for the kitchen now, so the nine of them scatter around the living room. Derek shoves Stiles into his Dad's armchair and then stands loomingly behind him, glaring at Jackson. Lydia, Jackson, Danny and Allison crowd onto the sofa and the betas group on and around the easy chair Stiles and his father never use, because it used to be his mom's favorite. (It's okay, though. They're pack. And it makes Stiles strangely... happy... to see the chair in use again.)

The air is saturated with the slick, soapy smell of suspicion and restrained fear. In spite of how it may appear, this is *not* a room full of close friends, and Derek's hand slides from Stiles' shoulder to the edge of his collar, fingertip pressed against the pulsing of his vein just below it. "You were going to tell us why you are here," Derek growls at Lydia. (No love lost there.)

Lydia leans forward to set her Coke can on the coffee table and smooths her hands over her knees. She reeks of nervousness, but it's not discernible on her face. "I have questions," she says, and Stiles thinks maybe he's the only person who can hear the bravado underlying her voice, although the pack can surely smell it. "And in exchange, I think we can help you find Scott."

Derek grunts, which evidently means, *Go on*. The betas all are bristling, and Erica's eyes glow gold. Stiles shakes his head a little. It's no surprise Lydia was able to figure them all out so quickly. They really are *not* subtle.

As if to underline his thought, Lydia glances pointedly over at Erica. "I know there's something. *Unnatural*, or, well, *supernatural* going on with you. I know that *you*," she nods towards Derek, "are also the service dog. Or, the service... wolf? And *you*," her sharp eyes fall to Stiles, "can turn into a fennec fox."

Stiles smirks at her. He's too impressed with her brains right now to feel scared. She hasn't told anyone their secret yet, and he doubts she will. Lydia has always played her cards close to the vest.

"I don't know about you three," she continues. "But you do the same things, the... *smelling*, and *touching* and *hearing*. You don't even *move* like regular people. And," she adds, bringing two forked fingers up to her own eyes and then flicking them towards Erica and Derek, "there's the whole eye thing."

Stiles can sense Derek's rigidity behind him, and figures he should intervene. He doesn't think this is the time for threats or posturing. What Lydia knows, she knows, and they can't make her unknow it. He blinks his eyes black, calling forth the slight itching behind his iris that means they've switched over, and then lets them relax back into human.

It is tacit confirmation.

Lydia settles back into the couch, arms crossing over her chest. Now she smells more satisfied than frightened. Danny, sitting on the arm next to Jackson, leans forward in vivid interest, mouth slightly opened. His eyes are huge. Jackson looks dumbstruck and marginally offended, like he thinks maybe he's being punked.

"Stiles—" Derek's fingers slide up his throat and stroke just behind his ear. Stiles can't help but lean into the touch a little, and his purr starts up, both in reassurance and acknowledgement.

"We can use all the help we can get," Stiles grates. Lydia's eyes widen, but she doesn't comment on his sudden, miraculous ability to speak, for which Stiles is thankful. He doesn't want to make any explanations. He reaches up and tangles his fingers with Derek's, pulling him around to perch on the arm of his chair. "We can answer your questions later, Lydia." (Never let it be said that Stiles doesn't recognize the advantage of a judicious bribe.) "Scott's been gone for two days now." His breath thins just thinking about it, and Derek responds to his escalating heartbeat by wrapping an arm around him and pulling him closer.

Stiles looks over to Danny. "You. I know you've got a record for hacking—"

Danny startles so hard he nearly falls off the sofa. "What? No. How—"

"Sorry, dude. Sorry. Sheriff's kid, here."

Danny wrinkles his nose, but doesn't protest. That seems justification enough for him.

"I think. I mean. I'm sure Scott's phone is dead now. He usually forgets to charge it anyway. But. Can you still track it, even if it's off?"

Danny shakes his head. "I can track where it was right before it powered down, but that's all."

Stiles' heart is pounding inside his rib cage, not fast, but hard, bruising his sternum, he's sure. "Okay. Okay, that's a good start. Can you do that now?"

Danny looks from one member of their motley group to another before nodding and reaching for his bookbag. He pulls out his laptop and slides to the floor, setting up on the coffee table. "It'll take me a little while," he says. "Do you know his carrier?"

Stiles tells him that, and his number, and tries not to dwell on how strange it feels to speak. Every word that comes up is painfully orchestrated: a seed in his mind, an instruction to his lungs, movement through his larynx, a muscular flex and flow of wind to make each syllable. It feel as

though they should get tangled in his tongue, trapped behind his lips, and he's nearly startled with each successful utterance.

Derek understands, Stiles thinks. He's got his hand wrapped around Stiles nape, but the fingertips rest just to the side of his Adam's apple, as though feeling the vibrations that accompany each sound. He tips his head up, to check, and Derek looks back down at him, solemn and stern, but the bond between them is quiet and steady and supportive, and Stiles knows that Derek trusts him, trusts his judgement, and that means *so much*.

Erica draws in a sudden breath, and everyone turns to her as she says, "Okay. You said you would help, but so far, I only see Danny doing anything. What does *this* asshat," she points a finger at Jackson, "have to contribute, huh? He's a bully and a douchebag, and personally, I don't trust him as far as I can throw him—"

Stiles almost laughs at that thought. He bets Erica could actually throw Jackson a fair way, and thinks he would *love* to see that.

Jackson draws back, offended, but Lydia puts a hand on his thigh, and Stiles can see her nails digging into the denim. "Jackson," Lydia answers, eyes narrowed but voice saccharine, "has a fast car and plenty of cash, both of which we may need."

"He's a stupid, sadistic piece of shit," Erica spits. "You know the things he's said to Stiles. Done. You were right there, weren't you, all these years. Egging him on."

Stiles suddenly feels afraid, which ticks him off: it's his *own* home, and no one is threatening him, and why should his skin go so icy and his face drain of color, and his heart crash around inside his chest. The possibility of humiliation, probably. He hasn't looked at Jackson since he first arrived, mostly just pretending he isn't there.

Lydia opens her red-painted mouth to respond, but Derek rises and crosses the room so fast it's like he teleported. He leans down on the coffee table, supports his weight on one clawed hand while the other presses against Jackson's chest. He growls, loud and warning, through a mouthful of fangs, and Stiles' hair stands on end at the primitive, implicit threat in the sound. Jackson flinches back as far as he can and then freezes, like a rabbit. Lydia freezes as well, and Danny scrambles away knocking his laptop to the floor in his retreat.

"Jackson won't *ever* insult or hurt Stiles again," Derek snarls. "Because if he does, I'll rip his throat out. With my teeth." There's a fraught pause. "And then I'll give his body to my betas to tear apart."

The betas appear to like that thought, and a trio of hungry growls rises from the chair across from the sofa, as three pairs of glowing gold eyes latch ferally onto Jackson.

"Get down on your knees," Derek roars, literally roars, Stiles can hear the rattle of the glasses on the coffee table, the wooden clatter of picture frames vibrating against the wall. Jackson goes white as a sheet and flinches before more or less diving to hit the floor on his knees. The room is silent, reverberating with tension, and Derek leans very close to Jackson, whose face gleams with sweat. "You're going to tell Stiles that you're sorry, aren't you, *worm*." Jackson's eyes are tightly closed, his head turned away, instinctively exposing his throat, and he swallows convulsively. He doesn't look handsome and confident now, which makes Stiles bare his teeth in visceral satisfaction. "And that you'll never do it again. Because from now on, you. will. *defend*. subs. Won't you? Like any Dom. That's your fucking life's calling now, isn't it? If you *want* to live."

The smell of fear and adrenaline flares across the room, and Stiles is frankly surprised that Jackson hasn't pissed himself, because he's pretty sure *he* would have if he'd been in Jackson's shoes.

Jackson is holding himself so still he isn't even breathing, and next to him, Lydia claws herself out of a similar state. "He won't," she agrees shakily. "None of us will, I swear. Never again."

"Did I ask to hear it from you?" Derek asks, menacing, and Lydia bobs her head and then shakes it, fingers twisting together.

Derek glares at Jackson, who jolts back from his complete paralysis, responding to Derek's impatience.

"No, sir," he gasps. "I mean. Sorry, Stiles. Sorry. I. I won't do it again."

Derek snorts disdainfully before swinging his head to the side to glare at Allison, who seems to have found a knife about her person somewhere and clutches it knowledgeably in her fist. "You can put that away," he grumbles. "I'm not going to kill him *now*."

Evidently, that's reassurance enough, because the knife vanishes from whence it came, before Lydia can ask any of the questions that are clearly raging through her mind.

Derek saunters back to Stiles, and *fuck*, Stiles kind of wants to rip his clothes off and squirm under his body and encourage him to have his way with him *rightfuckingnow*. And sexual arousal is probably the wrong response to such a violent and tense situation, and yet, when Derek approaches him, pale skin and hard muscle, predatory slink and menace – well, *fuck*, Stiles is popping a boner, and his jeans are too loose from all the weight he's lost to properly pin it down, and *shit*, this is embarrassing, but also, here comes Derek, his *Dom*, and Stiles can *see* the aura of power around him, a flickering red glow, like flame and shadow, and Stiles finds he's uncrossing his legs and starting to slither to the floor, because he wants to kneel at Derek's feet, really, wants to rub his face against his jeans, wants to wrap his hands around thighs like telephone poles and smell the musk of his sex and *suck his dick until he chokes* and what the fuck–

Derek grabs him by the upper arm before he actually slides to the floor, yanks him to his feet and guides him, stumbling, down the hall to the tiny bathroom, jamming both of them inside and shutting the door behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Oops, is that another cliffie? At least we get to enjoy Jackson being put in his place. That's satisfying, isn't it? I kinda want to bang Derek, myself. Unf.

Welp, Hurricane Irma is a couple of hours away. Even up here in Atlanta we're battening down the hatches. I've stocked up on the kids' ADD meds, wine and chocolate cake, so I'm taken care of if the power goes out or a tree falls on the house. (ETA: Hmmmm, I have to say that Irma was anticlimactic. I wouldn't even call it a bad storm, and wow, they cancelled two days of school for all this. Sound and fury, etc. . . .) For those of you in Florida or South Georgia: good luck, my friends... I hope you come out the other side with as few damages as possible. If you're in the Caribbean: *hugs*, so many hugs, dear people. I hope you and yours will be okay.

In which Stiles is GETTIN' SOME instead of giving, and there is a new revelation

Chapter Notes

Ooooh, y'all are gonna like this one, heh heh. I just turned myself on *editing*, so that's always a good sign....

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Sorry. I. I won't do it again." Jackson's grovelling is pathetic.

Derek is disappointed that he can't *eviscerate* this malicious, whining, overcompensating fauxDom, which he's wanted to do since the fool turned up at the kitchen door. He resists it, but his body is wild, turbulent with the need to *do* something. And then he turns around and sees Stiles–

Fuck.

Stiles, staring at him, cradled in his daddy's chair: he is a *vision*. He sits tailor-style, lanky in ragged jeans and a Batman shirt so worn and soft with age that Derek can see his nipples slowly peaking underneath it. His fair skin pinkens with a growing flush, starting at the center of his cheeks and spreading up and out and down. Derek can smell his blood rushing through surface capillaries, rich in iron, forming a base note for the sudden *lust* that spills over into the room, emanating from his mate like a beacon, heavy and musky and so *rich* and *ripe* that Derek responds instinctively with a subvocal growl that won't stop.

Stiles' eyes are lambent, honey-brown, wide and thick-lashed and he is deerlike – cervine – in his stillness, the way he waits to be hunted, soft lips open invitingly, blunt white teeth teased with the tip of his tongue. As Derek steps closer, he can see Stiles' cock thickening under his pants, rising in response to *him*, and Stiles squirms in the chair, rearranging his legs so he can shift to the edge, and everything about his body language shouts that he is about to slip down into a beautiful submissive kneel.

At this moment, there's nothing Derek would rather do than let him, to put on a performance for this roomful of people that showcases the level of their trust and devotion, the strength of their bond; nothing he'd rather do than push Stiles to his knees and grind the boy's face into his crotch – feel teeth against his inner thigh and hot breath gasped against his cock – watch the perfect *O* of his mouth slowly taking Derek's thick length. Derek clenches his hands into fists and cracks his neck. He is in just enough control of his primitive urges to know that this isn't the place.

He snatches Stiles up before he can slither into his kneel and hustles him from the room, opening the first door they reach, a tiny little powder room off the kitchen, and barricading them both inside.

Derek is high on protective fury, hormones flooding him with aggression, power, savagery. He reels with the urge to cover Stiles, control him. To inundate and *devour* him, swallow him down until he's safe in Derek's gut, no part of him not surrounded and unassailable. He knows that Stiles

is panting, *right now*, for domination: to be under, weighted down, forced still, guided; a commanding hand on his head, no choices.

He can *smell* it, rising lush from Stiles' skin, from his lips and his armpits and his sex. He can see it in Stiles' blown pupils, in the lucent shimmer of sweat blooming at his temples and across his cheekbones, in the way that Stiles leans towards him, in the laxity of his knees. He can feel Stiles' fierce yearning through the bond, a wanton tugging, a feral, celebratory, rewarding insistence that he succumb to Derek's desires.

Derek swallows against the saliva flooding his mouth, opens his lips to get some oxygen, tastes their ferocity and arousal in the air.

"Stiles—" and then he muffles his own words against Stiles' mouth, latching on in a brutal kiss, hands gripping his jaw, his nape, his shoulders, everything he can grapple. He feels a little like a tsunami, an omnipotent wave, just past its crest, falling downward all over Stiles, heavy and unbridled – inexorable. Derek leads with his lips, his teeth, the press of his chest, the strength in his hips.

Stiles is a willow beneath him: slender, pliable, achingly beautiful. His long fingers wrap tightly around Derek's biceps, a position he seems to prefer, and Derek willingly flexes the muscle there, giving him something to hold on to, something to admire, as he pushes Stiles until he's backed against the sink.

"Were you going to kneel for me, Stiles?" he rumbles into Stiles' neck, biting little bruises in a line from his ear to his collarbone. "In front of everyone there? Show them who dominates you? Where you belong?"

Stiles whines and shudders, and Derek smells the sharp bite of precome and damp denim. "Yes," he pants. "Yes. Alpha. God, you're so. Fucking *hot*. And—" He groans when Derek wraps his lips around the pulsepoint in his neck, sipping at him in pulsing waves to match Stiles' heartbeat. "Ungh. *God*. I wanted to blow you. Right there. I don't even. Didn't even care about everyone else. I wanted it. I wanted—" He drops both hands, one clamping around Derek's hip as it grinds against him and the other wedging in between their bodies to grab at his cock, rubbing and squeezing with more zeal than finesse. (But Derek's cock doesn't care.) He twists against Derek's chest, clearly aiming for the space to drop to his knees.

Derek's eyes just about roll with the surge of pleasure that springs from Stiles' artless caress and gasped admissions, but he maintains enough awareness to know that fellatio is an *issue* for Stiles... even if, in the heat of the moment, Stiles seems to have forgotten. "Fuck. Baby," It literally *hurts* him to pin Stiles to the countertop rather than encourage him to kneel, and his stomach clenches uncomfortably as he stiffens his muscles against the urge. "There's nothing I want more. Jumping jesus." He rapidly unbuttons Stiles jeans, jerks the zip open and hauls the whole mess of fabric down his thighs before lifting him to sit bare-assed on the counter. "But this is for you. Just for you. Need my mouth on you *now*—"

His sub is liquid and hot under his hands. The scent of him so luscious and willing – delirious with Derek's show of power and protection – is a drug like no other, and the world outside the pair of them is nebulous and vanishingly unimportant. "Next time you can have me if you want, mmm?" He drops to a knee, and Stiles is at the perfect height, pretty pink cock stiff and pointing at the ceiling, the dusky smell of him nearly overwhelming with his nose *right there*, and Derek wastes no time, but just opens his mouth and goes down, swallows Stiles to the root, and the kid jerks, and

wraps his legs tight around Derek's back. He stifles his first, startled cry with his hand, but that's the only consideration he gives to the potential audience some 15 feet and one locked door away.

It is over in minutes, both of them had been at the flash point before they even left the living room. Derek can feel the moment Stiles begins to topple over the edge, not only because of the change in flavor of the precome Derek's been assiduously drawing out of his cock, the way its girth increases and the rhythmic pulsing that overtakes it, but also because of the rigidity of Stiles' body, the sound of teeth sinking into flesh and the striation of scents in layers of pleasure and discomfort as his sub tries to transmorph his shout of release into silent pain, biting the fist he's jammed over his mouth.

Derek swallows.

Maybe the humans didn't hear anything. And it's not like the betas didn't know exactly what was going on the whole time.

Well. Probably *everyone* knows what is happening.

Derek is smug as he nurses Stiles through his orgasm and then gentling the pressure of his mouth as Stiles makes a small noise of protest. Derek lets his softening cock slide out until it lies quiescent along one pale thigh, gives the head one last, sucking caress before rising to his feet, wedging himself tightly against Stiles' body to kiss him even more breathless than he was before, the taste of his come warm and bitter and shared between their mouths.

Now Stiles is honeysuckle sweet with repletion: soft and content. He smells like *belonging*, like *inevitability*. He smells domestic and serene (but even in this state he has the piquancy of challenge, because Stiles will never, ever, be *easy*).

Stiles starts wiggling again, trying to slide off the counter, hands busying themselves under Derek's shirt, trying to get in his pants. Derek grins and clamps down, holding his boy still. "None of that," he rasps. "I'm good. Don't need anything other than you smelling like this." To prove it, he runs his nose behind Stiles ear, inhaling sweat and satisfaction, exhaling humid and hot into Stiles' ear, making him shiver. He tucks his erection up, into the waistband of his pants, disguising it slightly, even though he really gives no fucks about propriety right now.

Stiles makes a little noise, sinking back against him, and Derek gathers him in close, tucked under his chin and surrounded by his body, hand skating slowly up and down Stiles' back. His mind goes back outside, to the crowd in the living room. "Jackson won't ever hurt you again," he murmurs.

Stiles jerks a little, as though his own thoughts had been far away. But Derek needs to make sure Stiles knows. "It's obvious that Lydia has him under control," he continues, "She and Danny are both on board: they understand that you're *mine*." Damn straight, which is why he'd let them catch him starkers in the kitchen, wrapped around his sub. "Jackson has smelled of nothing but remorse whenever he looked at you today. He's clearly been disciplined." Derek pulls away enough to frame Stiles face in his hands, tipping it up so their gazes are locked. "I would never have left you in the room with him if I hadn't been certain of that."

Stiles rolls his eyes and knocks his temple against Derek's jaw. "Obviously," he mutters. "Now stop ruining my afterglow with, ugh, *Jackson*. That's so gross."

Derek snorts, and then dedicates a few seconds to running his fingers over his mate's thighs – pale and bared between his shirt and pants. He spiders them up and tugs playfully at some of the curls next to his flaccid dick. Stiles chokes a laugh and slaps his hand away, sliding off the counter and

tugging his clothes back into order. They both quickly wash their hands and then, after a final decency check, stroll back out. *Tra la la, nothing interesting happened here.*

“And was it good for *you*? ” Erica drawls out, first thing as they enter the den of awkward. Stiles’ face is already flaming, so it couldn’t get any more red, but Derek can feel the tips of his own ears starting to heat. Stiles, however, bulldozes through his embarrassment, giving the room a sassy wink and breathing on his nails before buffing them on his shirt. He sways back over to his chair and sags onto it with a big, showy sigh of satisfaction.

Derek hides his smile and stares his beta down, although she’s still snickering as she looks away. Boyd and Isaac are doing their best to pretend that nothing happened, Danny blushes wildly at his laptop, shoulders hunched, and Jackson pretends to be engrossed in his phone – but his pronounced flinches whenever Derek moves give him away.

Lydia sits up straight, stiff with etiquette, hands folded across her lap, and says, as if the interlude had never happened, “Jackson has volunteered to run out and get us pizzas while we wait. What kind do you want?”

Derek had heard no such conversation from the bathroom, and the surprise on everyone’s faces (especially Jackson’s) gives lie to her statement. But he takes it for the olive branch it is, smirking as Jackson leaps to his feet, digging his keys out of his pocket.

“Meat,” Derek grunts. “Veggie,” Stiles contributes, and then the betas join in. “Pepperoni.” “Hawaiian.” Jackson looks frankly relieved as he hurries away, and Derek catches Stiles’ impish grin. Derek uses his eyebrows to communicate a smile, pleased to see Stiles relaxed once more.

But in the background of his mind, in a message that thumps along with each beat of his heart, is the notion that they need to find Scott quickly. Derek doesn’t doubt that the hunters have him, and his skin crawls in remembrance of all the pain they’d dished out, to him and Stiles both.

In Derek’s nightmares, he’s still stuck in the basement, powerless and furious and afraid.

He’s been here before, enmired in this loop of fear and helplessness; ten years earlier when a hunter had slaughtered his family. And he’s had a decade of experience in pushing it down, in working around it. But when those feelings, as uncomfortable as they are, prod him to act, then he’s also learned to move decisively and without hesitation.

He doesn’t bother to agonize over this brief lull, when they pause to gather information, to eat and to rest. He sees no reason to feel guilt over what he and Stiles did in the powder room. They don’t need to feel shame about that... sex is an affirmation of life, after all, and a good outlet in stressful situations. Not to mention that the ten minutes they were gone wouldn’t have made a difference in getting to Scott any sooner.

By the time Jackson returns, bearing apology-pizzas and bottles of soda, Danny has grown grim. He shakes his head at Derek and Stiles, who have been watching him hunt and click and type rapid lines of illicit code. “The closest I can triangulate it are the cell towers near school, so it probably died there. I don’t think this is much for you to go on.”

Allison makes a small, unhappy sound, and Derek casts her a look of carefully disguised sympathy. He finds the torrid high school affair between her and Scott to be saccharine and uncomfortable, but even so, having your boyfriend in the clutches of known sadists isn't something he'd wish on anyone. (Except maybe Lydia.)

Stiles is on his fourth slice, and picks up his drink as he shoves the last of it into his mouth. The can, slick with condensation, slips out of his grasp immediately, and Derek shoots a hand forward to catch it before it can spill.

"*Umfm,*" Stiles mumbles urgently through his mouthful. "Eh ay uh emmhme. Eh eh inkin ahoo gnurin. Ehehee. Rrrrr." A couple bits of chewed pizza spray from his mouth.

Derek stares at him incredulously. He'd frankly been easier to understand when he was entirely mute. Danny, to whom Stiles had evidently been speaking, looks thoroughly bewildered. Stiles growls and hurries to finish chewing and swallow, which takes twice as long now that everyone is staring. He keeps gesturing between his cup and Danny's laptop as if they're supposed to get something from that.

"Unh. Okay. But, and this is totally a side note, but I just remembered Cecily," and he points at his cup again, as if there's some kind of connection he's making between the two. "Could you find a number for her, do you think? I'd just like to text and see if she's okay."

Lydia's eyebrows shoot up. "The new girl? in the wheelchair? You think she's been kidnapped as well?"

Stiles falls back in surprise and then vigorously shakes his head. "No. No, unh-unh. *Toootally* unrelated. Just, she's got a *thing*, and I wanted to send her a text or something, be sure she's okay and not, you know, degenerating. Or maybe you can check the hospital, Dan-my-man? I mean, she'd probably at least like some balloons or something. She doesn't have any other friends."

Ah. Yes. Cecily had described her illness to them as 'neurological degeneration', hadn't she? Right when she'd dropped her drink during lunch. Derek supposes he shouldn't be surprised that Stiles has the capacity to worry for more than just one friend. The more Stiles begins to speak, and open up, the more it becomes obvious how intelligent and *involved* he is. He watches everything, and his brain clearly goes around at 100mph, never stopping. There's a lot going on in there. (Derek will wait until later to savor how smug he feels over picking such a superlative partner. Even though he didn't actually *pick* him. More like fell over him in the middle of a dire situation.)

"What's her last name?" Danny inquires, after cringing a little at Stiles new appellation.

Stiles freezes and purses his mouth, eyes going side to side over nothing as he thinks. "Hmmmm. Don't know. Huh. 'M'not even sure what grade she's in. Anyone?" Everyone else shakes their heads: she's not in any of their classes. Danny groans. "She just transferred here," Stiles offers. "Does that make it easier?"

Danny doesn't answer, just flaps a hand at Stiles as he dives back online. Isaac rises to start clearing up, and Jackson leaps to his feet to assist... and escape the living room.

An hour later, the house smells delicious, as Boyd and Isaac have just taken cookies from the oven. Jackson has clearly decided it's safer to be with them in the kitchen than in the living room with Derek, so he helps, silent and diffident. Lydia does homework, Erica kibitzes and flops around impatiently in her chair, Stiles paces and picks the skin away from his fingers, and Derek leans against the mantel, where he has a view into the kitchen as well, keeping an eye on everyone. Every few passes, Stiles will come close and lean against him for a moment. Perhaps for strength, or comfort, Derek doesn't know and it doesn't matter when he nuzzles his nose into Stiles' hair, heartening them both.

"I've got her!" Danny says at last, sitting straight triumphantly and cracking his back. "I just had to read through a *thousand* school records, ugh. Gimme one of those cookies." He groans a little, stretching backwards to take the cookie Jackson hands him. "Cecily Arabel Willis, 9th Grade, transfer from Cardiff, Wales."

Derek goes rigid at the name, hissing in a short breath, and Stiles turns slowly around from where he's been standing at the window, eyes wide and shadowed with stupefaction. They look at each other for a moment, and Derek can feel the shockwave of fear and surprise coming down the bond.

And Derek remembers.

"I'm not cleaning up if that room is a bloodbath," Gunner grumbled. "But twenty bucks says they're both still alive."

"Who gives a shit either way, you jackass," Baron said. "Not like anyone'll be in there long anyway."

"We've got to wait for Mr. Willis... could take weeks, and I wanna keep my fucking slave while we gotta stay in this fucking backwater."

...

Stiles lay in the corner, gasping for air, reeking of shock and blood and fear when Rudy came back downstairs to toss a beer at Gunner just as Gunner's phone buzzed with a message.

"Is it Laxmi?"

"She says Mr. Willis might be here tomorrow."

"Why do he want the Alpha alive?"

"Something about being sick. Said old man Argent knew a trick for cancer."

...

The conversation Stiles said he overheard from the gazebo in the park: Laxmi being berated by a man with an accent for not having the Alpha packaged and ready to deliver as promised.

Willis. The shadowy figure behind everything that's happened, the puller of strings, the money and driving force behind the entire operation.

Cecily's father.

Derek closes his eyes for a moment, trying to breathe, deafened by the sound of Stiles escalating heartbeat clamoring in his ears.

Chapter End Notes

Oops. Another cliffhanger? How did that happen? Goodness, I'm so mean to y'all. At least you had the good stuff at the beginning this time, huh? I'm sorry I didn't answer half the comments from the last chapter. I got lazy? Actually a lot of them were insightful and thought-provoking, which are the kind of comments I love best, but also the ones I keep putting off answering, because I have to *think*.

We're getting to the point where there are going to be some issues left unaddressed, I think. I'm halfway through Ch. 49, and I'm pretty sure Ch. 50 will just be Epilogue, and at some 175k, I worry that tying every single loose end up neatly will just wind up dragging things out and boring you. Ugh. After I finish 49, I'm going to sit down and reread the whole story, see where everything started and where it went: it's been two years since I began writing, and I'm worried I might be forgetting or overlooking important stuff. (This is what happens when you write by whimsy rather than outline, sigh.)

When I started, there were some key things I wanted as part of my new story: mute and traumatized young Stiles, the captivity, their utter helplessness, the isolation and codependency, the growing D/s bond through torment and caretaking, the pen in the ass (seriously, that was the kernel of the idea that birthed the story, god, I'm such a weirdo), the fennec fox thing, bullying in school with protective service dog Derek, and Stiles' slow recovery back into the irrepressible young man we know him to be.

(I never did find an opportunity for them to fuck against a wall in the cellar – with Derek seated, arms chained out and Stiles lowering himself on his dick, mute and abused, desperate for physical closeness in lieu of safety – which was also a vignette that inspired this story. Maybe I'll do a oneshot someday.)

Everything else is kind of secondary (including the wheresoires and most of the plot, lol) and/or developed naturally out of addressing other considerations. It grew into a monster as I wrote, and suddenly I needed pack feels, and then there was tension with the Sheriff that I'd never planned, societal issues surrounding the D/s dynamic, Chris/John (what even?), and Stiles' Alphamate bond magic, and, well, I don't even know, but it's a juggernaut, and I need to stop before I have any more ideas, dammit.

Basically all of this is to say that I sometimes get a little overwhelmed about how to address everything, and since I'm flying blind all the time, all these puzzle pieces don't match up

perfectly, and then I feel like I need a whole new chapter to explore something that I hadn't thought much about before....

One of the most amazing things about this journey is how many smart, curious, thoughtful readers have joined me on it. And without having you pipe up with your wholehearted encouragement, reactions and ideas, I wouldn't have grown as a writer, and my characters wouldn't have grown into people with this much depth and authenticity. Sometimes, trying to cross a simple trope (like those which inspired this story) with characters who are as real as I can craft them to be, makes me feel a little like a lion tamer, armed only with a chair in a cage full of big, recalcitrant cats.

High Gear

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Give me that address, Danny,” Stiles says after a prolonged moment where he and Derek stare at each other in shock. “Now!” he snaps, when Danny just stares at him. Stiles can sense the surprise in the room at his sudden authoritative tone, and a quick glance at his Dom only shows Derek’s face in its typical murderous resting expression. But the bond is singing with pride at his assertion, so that’s alright.

Wide-eyed, Danny turns back to his screen and reads out the address, which Derek taps into his phone. Erica says, “Stiles? Derek? What does Cecily have to do with this?” The room is becoming stuffy with the resinous deposition of surprise and confusion.

But Derek ignores her and says, “Stiles, call your father. Allison, you, too. Tell them to meet us...”

“Wait,” Stiles says, thinking fast. “They need to meet us here, Derek. We can’t go all half-cocked. We don’t even know for sure—”

“We *do* know for sure,” Derek growls. “That’s why we always caught such a faint trace of the hunters at school. It was always too... obscured... to have been them *actually* in the school: that’s why we thought we were just imagining it.”

Stiles purses his lips as he thinks. “Yeah, okay. Occam’s razor applies here, for sure.”

Isaac makes a questioning noise, but Stiles carries on, caught up in the whirling machinations of his own thoughts. “Cecily has a neurological disease. It’s degenerative, and she already uses a wheelchair, so it must have progressed pretty far already. There’s all kinds, I mean, “neurological disease” is a *huge* umbrella term. I. I did some reading when my mom. It could mean anything from Multiple Sclerosis to Alzheimer’s. But she said she’s losing sensation in her hands, that’s why she was dropping things, right. And her feet don’t work. If it’s peripheral, like that – hands and feet – then it eventually moves in towards the center, I think, and starts messing with the brain, the heart, the lungs. Degenerative implies it’ll continue to get worse until...” ... *until she dies*, he doesn’t say, because it’s too hard to think of Cecily like that. “... until those things can’t work any more.”

“She said they’d come here for medical treatment because it wasn’t available in the U.K.,” Derek remembers.

“Yeah, I thought at the time that was strange. Because, Beacon Hills? What the hell do we have to offer on an international medical landscape? With our one podunk county hospital? Fuck all, that’s what. Fuck, fuck, I should have known then.” His hands fist up and he wants to punch something for not putting the pieces together when they were *right in front of him*.

“Dad says he’ll be here in 15,” Allison says briskly, when her phone buzzes. That startles Stiles into action, and he rapidly texts his own father.

"I don't understand," Lydia says, sounding strangely tentative. "You think that this girl and her illness... have to do with Scott being missing?"

"I don't get it either," Boyd says. "Cecily has something to do with the hunters?"

"Her *father*," Stiles answers. "When we were. When we were," he looks at Derek for help, and Derek says, "We heard the hunters referring to 'Mr. Willis' as the person who had orchestrated, or at least, ordered, our... capture."

"But why—" Lydia doesn't get a chance to finish.

"It's the healing factor, isn't it?" Allison guesses. "They were trying specifically to bag an Alpha, weren't they?"

Stiles shrugs and moves closer to Derek, pressing against his side, relieved when Derek immediately closes his arm around him. "I heard R-Rudy say," he has to stop to clear his throat, because even saying that name makes him ill and afraid and *dirty*, and he wants to spit, or maybe brush his teeth with bleach. "He said that werewolves can heal stuff. Which, obviously. But—"

"Werewolves!" Lydia seems less like she's participating in the conversation than having a mini-epiphany off to the side. "Not just shapeshifters, then. But wait, how does that explain—"

Stiles interrupts again, because he's a little sensitive about being a teeny fox when everyone else gets to be a great, rangy fucking *wolf*, alright, and he doesn't have an explanation anyway. "He said," Stiles closes his eyes to recall all the words exactly. They're rather burned into his brain, because that's when he had learned that he could get desperately needed strength if only Derek would bite him, strength enough to escape the intolerable situation he'd been trapped in. "He said..."

"Why do he want the Alpha alive?" Rudy had asked.

"Something about being sick. Said old man Argent knew a trick for cancer."

"Old man Argent is dead," Rudy scoffed. "Whatever his trick was didn't work, duh." Stiles remembers hearing the gulping sound as he swallowed his beer, the echo of his casual belch, as if Stiles, bloody and naked, huddled into the corner, didn't impact him at all. As if Derek, similarly covered in blood, shocked into silence and chained to an electrified fence wasn't worth consideration.

"Meh," Gunner hadn't bothered to look at either of their prisoners either, evidently fine now that Rudy wasn't being homo. "Something about the bite of an Alpha curing all that ails you."

"...The bite of an Alpha cures what ails you.' So maybe." Stiles is getting worked up, mind moving too fast for his body, belly roiling with fearsome memories. He steps away from Derek and starts pacing, hands picking at each other where they're held tight in front of his chest. He feels a little like he's just been knocked over by a strong wave, getting dragged along the sand underwater, and

he doesn't even need to blink to see the damp, fluorescent-lit basement, smell the copper and the pain and the fear.

Isaac picks up on Stiles' distress, rising suddenly and then standing there in front of Stiles, everyone looking at him, appearing a bit confused.

"Maybe" Isaac offers in his tentative manner, "I mean. Everyone is really." He slowly moves to stroke Stiles' shoulder, comforting. "Maybe I could get some snacks? While we wait?"

"We just ate," Danny says, looking confused.

"Oh, well, I—"

Derek slides his hand around Isaac's neck, gripping it firmly and pulling the agitated sub in closer, squishing Stiles' in with his other arm. Lydia darts a look at Stiles to see how he reacts to his Dom comforting another, but actually, watching Derek as he pulls Isaac's forehead down to his shoulder is heartening. He can feel Derek pulsing calm and reassurance through the pack bond, and Stiles tries to add his own to it. Isaac visibly relaxes – along with Stiles himself – and Derek cards his fingers through his curls before pushing him gently back into the chair with Erica and Boyd, who immediately curl around him, protective and affectionate.

A few blocks away, Stiles can hear a familiar rattling engine. He freezes and looks to the door, and a moment later, so does the rest of the pack as they hear a car approaching the house. It's his father's cruiser, and he unwinds a little more, because *Dad...* and somehow, having a parent around makes everything a bit more manageable, serves to demarcate the difference between the situation now and their bleak prospects in the basement of that cold cabin. Stiles lets his breath out in an audible gust, pushing the nascent panic attack away with it, and Derek pulls him in to press his face very briefly against his hair.

They open the door to his father, with Mr. Argent close on his heels, and there is a period of chaos when everyone gets resettled and Lydia and her entourage are explained. The Sheriff gives Jackson an extremely narrow-eyed assessment, and the bully shrinks back into the sofa, eyes cast to the side, clearly trying to make himself invisible, heart thumping fast and hard. He reeks of guilt, which brings Stiles much satisfaction.

Stiles and Derek catch the two adults up, without specifically mentioning Danny's illegal assist (although Danny gets the narrow-eyed treatment as well, and it's clear that John is well able to fill in the holes in that particular part of the story).

"So you think Mr. Willis somehow ordered the whole thing, from 3000 miles away, as a last-ditch effort to cure his daughter," Chris summarizes thoughtfully.

"Yes? I mean. He could be a hunter, too. I don't know. But Cecily doesn't seem to know anything about werewolves. She'd have picked up on us by now, if she'd known."

Allison snorts at that, and Lydia hums in agreement, throwing a sly look at her friend. "You *aren't subtle*, that's for sure," Lydia says, *sotto voce*.

"Alright," John stands up, brushing his hands against his thighs and briefly touching his holster. "Text me that address, kiddo, and Chris and I will go check it out."

Stiles sucks in a breath, but John throws up an experienced hand, palm out, towards his face. "Ah! Stiles! No. You stay here. You all stay *right here*. I will not let these... *vermin*... get their hands on another child."

"No! Dad, but—"

"No buts, son." John grasps Stiles' chin and makes sure he's focused. He looks tired, face drawn into lines of age and stress. "I never want to lose you again."

"But sir," Derek tries to intervene, and gets excoriated by another Stilinski glare.

"That order includes you, Derek, even if you *are* an adult. Chris and I will go see what we can find out, and you will all. stay. right. here."

"Dad, you can't smell them and you can't hear them," Stiles says in a rush, well-practiced in the art of blurting it out before his dad gets a chance to shut him up. The comment takes John aback, and he visibly reconsiders. Chris, standing just behind his shoulder, only purses his lips and stares up at the ceiling. He knows how well supernatural senses would serve them in the investigation, but he appears content to let John come to that conclusion on his own.

"Dad, take me and Derek. I can hear more than *anyone*. You know I can. I can hear if there are *roaches* in that house. I can count heartbeats. I know Cecily's scent. I'll for damn sure know if they have Scott. I mean, we might not even have to get out of the car."

John grinds his teeth and frowns terribly, and Stiles grins in relief. Yep, his dad is going to cave.

The house Dafydd Willis rented for his daughter's 'treatment' is not too far from school: just a regular little bungalow in a century-old neighborhood built around gigantic, drooping hemlocks and pocket-handkerchief lawns. John mentions that he knows it's wheelchair accessible, since the old woman who used to live there had used one until she'd died last year. (The entire Sheriff's Department does regular rotations with Meals on Wheels.)

They pass the house slowly and circle the block, Stiles' furry ears out and twitching. They coast quietly to a stop at the side of the cracked road a few houses down from the Willis abode, car safely hidden behind low-drooping evergreen branches. John and Chris stay silent, so that Stiles and Derek (behind the steel grill in the squad car, like criminals) can do some preliminary scoping.

Stiles is better at fighting his way through the unremitting barrage of sounds, now. He closes his eyes and moves beyond the ticking of the engine, the roar of the heater, the car filled with beating hearts and rushing blood, the cottony rustle of shifting clothes, the soft wind of multiple breaths. Outside, the street is much like his own: kids, televisions, radios, noisy pets and noisier conversations. His ears swivel attentively as he slowly nails each sound down to the house from which it emanates.

He vaguely registers that he's got one hand clenched over Derek's on his leg, steadyng him in the dizzying rush and tumble of aural input. But Derek waits patiently, as do John and Chris, and Stiles is relieved that they are trusting him on this, and not pressuring him. He exhales slowly, focused

now solely on the Willis house. It is clearly empty. Not silent, of course. His ears really are good enough to hear the scratchy scrabble of insects, the hum of central heating, the buzz of the refrigerator. But there are no heartbeats inside, he's certain.

"Empty," he says finally, shaking his head slightly, as though coming out of water.

Derek doesn't wait, but quickly pulls off his jacket and shirt, starts on his pants while John and Chris gape at him.

Stiles rolls his eyes and explains to the adults, "Now we go sniff around: we'll learn more than you will, for sure, unless you're planning on breaking in?"

"What? Not—"

John doesn't get further than that before Derek shifts into his magnificent wolf form, black and imposing and really, nearly too big for the back seat. Both of the men in the front jump, although they also look deeply fascinated. Stiles less smoothly shimmies out of his own clothes, ignoring his father's muttered, "Dear god, I'm going to have to arrest us all for public indecency." Stiles doesn't bother taking off his underpants and jeans, because, *ew*, he doesn't want his naked ass on the back bench of a squad car – who knows what kind of bodily fluids have anointed it? Anyway, it's not like he'd rip up his clothes during a shift since he *shrinks* instead of grows (thank you, fucking gods of werewolf whimsy).

In the next moment, the back of the squad car is peopled (*canined?* Heh.) with an excessively massive wolf and disparately teeny fennec fox. Both faces swing simultaneously forward to eye the two men in the front, and Chris fails to stifle a snicker when the impatient little fox lifts his pale faux-eyebrows in an unmistakable signal for his father to *open the door already*. With a sigh, John does so.

Chapter End Notes

What do y'all think of [this](#) as a new summary (compared to the one I've been using since the beginning). Which should I use? (I won't use it with that picture, though, since I don't want to give the game away. This whole thing started because wolf!Derek and fox!Stiles are about to slip out of the car and slink around the house, and it's twilight, and winter, and this is what they look like, I think. But you won't see that here until the next chapter....)

Also: I've broken 5k kudos, y'all! And nearly 1300 bookmarks. I love you so much, ya hear me? LOVE. YOU. Thank you!

Superpowers, Dude

Derek quickly moves to take the lead, even though the Sheriff had opened the door on Stiles' side first. As a fox, Stiles is even more distractible than he is as a human; and while his hearing may be much more sensitive than Derek's own, Derek is accomplished at tracking and sussing out information in wolf form. He noses briefly at Stiles' collar (bunched up to its fullest extent, triskelion glinting briefly in the streetlight... it's a little loose around his tiny neck, but not enough so that it would fall off) and grunts an admonishment to be careful as he slinks into the shrubbery next to the vehicle.

Stiles trots after him and Derek listens to the soft patter of tiny paws across soft earth, the racing rhythm of Stiles' heart. The audible presence of his mate, healthy and quick, is comforting and stabilizing. Derek instinctively conceals his much larger form, slinking from shadow to shadow as he leads the way through the few lots between the squad car and the Willis house. They brush under a massive hemlock, glittering with water from the foggy drizzle and spicy with the scent of bruised needles. A breeze rustles through the branches, and Derek shakes his head free of a spatter of cool droplets while Stiles sneezes behind him. Winter's early twilight is already encroaching, intensifying the gloom, making it easy for them to vanish from view, despite the jarring disconnect of a wolf and fennec fox in a suburban landscape.



For the past few weeks, Derek had actually been physically closest to Cecily during all of their lunches, since he always sat between her and Stiles. Her scent is easy to discern, soft and powdery, underlain with the oils of her hair and the steel and leather of her chair. As they approach the house he can pick up the smell of old wood, benign mildew, dust... the unique house signature that Cecily had carried on her skin and in her clothing.

The pair of them glide first around the side of the house and towards the back door, nosing around industriously. Stiles huffs, down by Derek's foreleg, and sits on his haunches to stare up at him. His foxy brows pull down, and one ear just... flops over. His body language is clear: frustration

and confusion. Derek agrees. The back door smells of nothing much... no one's been in or out of it in a week or more. There are no clues to be gathered here. The fact that there are five rickety steps before accessing a muddy, weed-choked back yard is explanation enough: this is no place for a wheelchair, and presumably, Cecily's father has been too busy with werewolf hunters to stroll outside for a drink or a smoke.

Cautiously they work their way around to the front. The porch light is off, as are those inside, but there's a streetlight in the corner of the yard, and they'll be exposed up at the door. They start at the driveway, Stiles dancing here and there, nose down and then up as he catches traces of this and that, ears swivelling cartoonishly, catching sounds indistinguishable to the wolf. Derek is more methodical, progressing quickly from the mailbox at the street to the wooden ramp that stretches from the driveway to the front door.

The regular passage of the girl and her father are easy to mark. He smells of wool, shoe polish and cologne, over the same skin-and-oil scent he shares with his daughter. Very, *very* faintly, Derek can catch traces of hunter, mostly just a bare suggestion of their wolfsbane gas and Laxmi's perfumed lotion. It only lingers in the air, never a handprint on the rails or the doorknob, which is sufficient to confirm that the Willises have had contact with the hunters, but clearly have never physically had one at the house.

Down the street, a cat yowls a sharp, loud warning, and then dogs start up, barking frantically, each staccato sound echoing slightly off houses and cars. Stiles jumps instinctively, clearing a good couple feet of air before landing and looking sheepishly at Derek to see if he'd been noticed. Derek smirks his lupine appraisal of Stiles' jitters and knocks into Stiles' side with his cheek. Stiles staggers a few steps, bumping into the front door before bouncing back and headbutting Derek. Derek ignores the blow like the kitten paw it resembles, huffing.

There is nothing more to learn from the house: Dafydd and Cecily Willis definitely live here, but Scott has never been anywhere in the vicinity, and neither have the hunters. Time to leave. Derek tenses his back legs and then leaps easily over the porch railing, clearing the shrubs that line it as well. Stiles, after a moment of darting back and forth, slips between the balusters before hopping down and going *under* the bushes. He growls a little at Derek when they meet up, and Derek lolls his tongue out, teasing, before licking at Stiles' ears.

Stiles flicks his ears away and then darts off, back towards the car, fluffy tail a spectral gray in the gloaming. Derek lopes after him, still moving fluidly in the shadows. A nearby dog's bark changes in pitch from twilight gossip to hysterical territoriality as it catches a whiff of them, which sets off a chain reaction until the little neighborhood is nearly a cacophony. When they reach the Sheriff, Derek looks into the window and catches John's eye.

Behind him, Stiles is bounding like a jack-in-the-box... possibly to get his dad's attention, but more probably because it's fun. Derek can see him from the corner of his eye, shimmering pale fur, down and up and down and up again. When Stiles changes direction slightly, Derek isn't startled to feel his negligible weight scrabbling at his back, trying to get solid purchase. John bursts into restrained laughter, just as he's opening his door, and beside him, Chris has a hand over his mouth.

Derek agrees, really. He's pretty sure that bearing a fox on his back is demeaning to his dignity, but, eh, it's Stiles, who is kind of anti-dignity at any given time, and Derek is content to let him have a moment of fun before they have to make their grim report.

Snorting, John pulls himself out of the car to open the door behind him, and Stiles walks *right over Derek's head* to be the first inside. He sits on the seat, in his wad of clothing, and yips triumphantly at Derek, presumably asserting that while he can't jump over a bunch of bushes, he can still stand on Derek's head. Chris coughs into his fist, and Derek is *sure* he didn't hear a choked 'sucker' worked into it. John waits for Derek to get in, but his quiet laughter doesn't stop. Derek figures it's a strategy he's developed over years of facing stressful situations as a cop: glean whatever humor you can find, so that the world doesn't become too grim.

As soon as the pair is settled, still in their fur, John settles himself back into his seat and turns around. "Did you find any trace of Scott?" Derek and Stiles both shake their heads, and John and Chris frown.

"How about the hunters?" Chris asks. Derek blinks, and then tilts his head from side to side, trying to mime a shrug, *so-so*. "Maybe?" Chris guesses. "Not sufficient data?"

Derek glances at Stiles, who is standing alertly in the nest of his clothes, huge ears cocked forward, whiskers quivering.

Derek stretches his spine with a loud wheeze and then shifts, popping his neck as he sheds his fur. Stiles stares at his nudity unabashedly... one might even say lasciviously... while John and Chris gape: they are less used to shifting than Stiles, obviously. To ease their awkwardness, Derek pulls a shirt across his lap.

"I caught faint traces of them," he says, stopping to clear his throat after the abrupt shift from wolf to human vocal apparatus. "Both of us did, but nothing that indicated they actually came here. Probably her father met with them somewhere else."

Both men have turned around, caught up enough in the report that they're no longer broadcasting their discomfort with his nudity.

"There's *no* trace of Scott. Nothing." Next to him, Stiles nods emphatically, and then whines, scooting closer to Derek's thigh and laying his snout pitifully against the draped shirt. Derek reaches down to fondle his ridiculous ears and smooth his hand around his back and ribs, gently pulling down the length of his tail. "If you can drive with the windows down, Stiles and I can keep scenting. Maybe try some motels? Rental houses, I don't know. They'll have to have a bit of privacy, whatever they're doing, and there has to be space for the two hunters, Scott, and potentially both Mr. Willis and Cecily."

"Hmmm, wheelchair accessible, too," John murmurs. "Unless her father is carrying her. Or she can walk short distances."

Chris lowers his window, and John does as well – since there is no such thing as windows that open in the backs of squad cars. Derek shifts back into his fur in a smooth motion. He positions himself behind Chris, nose only inches away from the window. Stiles tries to get closer to his dad's widow, but doesn't accomplish more than falling off the seat. His subsequent yips are demanding... and embarrassed.

They eventually dispose themselves with Stiles on Chris's thigh, nose out the window, paws propped against the door, Chris's hands careful around his ribs. Derek can sense Stiles' reluctance to be in such a vulnerable position next to the hunter (even though both of them can smell quite clearly that Chris and John are spending a whole lot of... *quality time*... together, which makes Chris seem more trustworthy. Derek moves to the other side, still in the back, after briefly touching

Stiles' nose through the wire cage for reassurance. When they've settled, John starts out on patrol, heading first for the closest motels, near the highway.

Over three hours' driving around nets them nothing, although the humans have become better at picking up on Derek and Stiles' animal responses to their periodic queries. They stop at a drive-thru for dinner, which Derek and Stiles happily wolf down in their animal forms while Chris and John eat theirs somewhat more delicately. John makes a point of frowning at his son when he orders a veggie burger, and Stiles smug triumph fills the car for a while, lightening the mood (which, Derek realizes, must have been John's intent).

They return, discouraged, and the worried tension ratchets up. There is nothing more to do tonight, so Derek shifts and says goodnight, bringing fox-Stiles back to the loft after assuring John that they'll text at 6am to ensure that everyone is okay. Now they can only sleep. In the morning, they'll keep looking, and hope there will be a new sign.

Stiles knows he is dreaming. Mostly because there's nothing to hear, no odor to detect. The scene is purely visual, smokey at the edges, where the room blurs out of view. It is almost as though a spotlight shines, and Scott is in its center, bound to a chainlink fence just like Derek had been at the cabin. The setting is different, something that looks and feels more like a vast warehouse than the cramped, damp basement where Stiles and Derek had been captive and tortured. Stiles feels floaty, incorporeal, diffused into the scene.

Scott's head hangs down, his face obscured by shaggy brown hair. His weight is clearly dangling from his arms, and Stiles winces in sympathy. Blood drips from a long cut in his chest, mingles with sweat and softens into a watercolor wash across his stomach, staining the waist of his pants. He twitches periodically, a full-body spasm that makes Stiles think he's being shocked, and his hands are clenched into tight, bleeding fists that never relax.

This is the worst part of nightmares: trying to move. All Stiles wants to do is approach, to get his hands on his best friend, to help him down, help him away. He pushes with all his might, but the fog that he is only drifts as in an eddy, no forward progress at all. Stiles holds his breath, strains, tries to remember what it's like to have legs, castigates himself for his inability. All he needs to do is *walk*. How can that be so hard?

But the dream holds him fast, the miasma of fear and pain and the suffocating sense of dread cling to him like sap. His only option is to witness. His mouth is open, his lungs heave, but no sound comes out, no cry for help, no words of comfort for his tormented friend.

Shadows move in the periphery, and Stiles knows it is the hunters, looming to the left and right, inky black and pulsing with menace. Scott shudders, chained to the fence like an animal, helpless, and Stiles. can't. move.

Stiles awakens in the center of a wolf-pile, and for a disorienting moment, before his brain comes online, none of it makes sense and his heart pounds with fear, lungs paralyzed still. He blinks, breathes deeply. Nightmare. It was only a nightmare. He is as warm as he could ever wish to be, and the smell of pack and security and *belonging* is immersive. (And what is his life that being surrounded by gigantic wolves means he is safe?)

He needs to relax, but he quickly remembers where he is, and why, and thoughts of his best friend rise and choke him: Scott laughing at Stiles' antics, pushing him playfully off the low wall next to the school; Scott hugging him tightly after he'd presented, hand warm around the back of his neck; Scott playing Playstation, fingers stained orange and empty soda cans strewn around; Scott there at every birthday, every holiday, every milestone in Stiles' life. Scott snuggling next to him in the dark, patient and wounded, holding him as he cried for his mom.

Derek lifts his head and carefully places one enormous paw on Stiles' side. His unvoiced reassurance is clear: *Stiles, calm down. Stiles, I am here, your pack is here, we will find him.*

Stiles twists around to lick Derek's nose (something that would be *so gross* as a human, ugh) feeling the cool texture of it against his tongue, the faint residue of salt, the taste of his breath. Derek returns the gesture. His tongue, and the inside of his mouth, is a dark purpley-black in this form, and it's nearly as wide as Stiles' whole face, engulfing his muzzle and then sweeping up to eyes, eyebrows and ears. Stiles wrinkles his nose and jumps away, surprising himself a little by landing on the floor, having leaped clear over Isaac, who'd been curled up next to him.

A glance up at the clock shows it to be only 5:30am, but he knows he won't be going back to sleep. He shakes off his fur between one step and the next, heading for the kitchen, and coffee with a brief detour for a shirt and some boxers. A soft thump behind him means that Derek is coming with.

Scott has been missing now for some 60 hours, if Stiles assumes he was kidnapped the moment Stiles dropped him off at his house and drove away: and Stiles *does* so assume, since he is... ahem... *slightly* pessimistic. Not pessimistic enough to give up in despair... but cynical enough to expect a fight and prepare for it. His dream was horrendous, and shivers periodically rough his skin as he drinks coffee in the slowly lightening kitchen.

He thinks of how it must have been for his dad, forcing himself to sleep at night – knowing Stiles was gone, thinking of all the hellish things that could be happening to his son – and marvels at his strength. It's a different kind of torture, being the person on the other side of that equation, the one left wondering, instead dealing with the pain. Stiles' imagination is fertile, and spews up images of Scott that he'd really rather not contemplate. Scott is *human*. He cannot bounce back from extended torture like Derek... like even Stiles did, albeit more slowly.

Stiles takes a shuddering breath, and Derek reaches across the old kitchen table to envelop his hand, expression soft with compassion. "We'll find him, baby."

Stiles tries to huff, but it escapes as more of a sob. "Thanks. Thanks. I know. I mean. I know he's not part of the pack, but—"

"Stiles." Derek interrupts him with a firm tone. "He's important to you. That's enough. But even—" He releases Stiles hand and sprawls back in his chair, sweeping his legs forward to close around Stiles' own in a calf hug, which feels nice. Derek scrubs his hand over his face before grabbing his mug and holding it close to his chest. "Listen. Before we... met... I had a pack,

right? Three betas. And *you* had a pack. Humans do it too, you know, but in a, I don't know, a... less formal kind of way."

Stiles starts chewing on his thumb, and his eyes feel hot with the intensity with which they're fixed on Derek's face, the way his mouth moves when he talks.

Derek appears to give up on a more sustained explanation. "Your pack is my pack," he says. "You're my mate. Scott is part of our pack."

"Really? And. And Dad, too?"

Derek rolls his eyes and doesn't even bother to respond to that one, since it's patently obvious. Stiles continues tearing away the cuticle of his thumb, thinking.

"We have to find him *now*, Derek. You know what they're probably doing," Stiles says. He drops his face into his hands and takes a deep breath, swallowing past the lump in his throat. "I dreamed. I was dreaming about it. There has to be something more we can *do*.

"We're fucking... this is fucking *magical*. This isn't real life. You're a *werewolf*, for chrissake. We're talking about *packs*. This is. This is a *fairy tale*. Or, you know, a Grimm brothers' version.

"But. There has to be something. If we've sidestepped reality like this. I feel like there should be a... a *deus ex machina*, maybe. We'll suddenly be able to fly. Or. Or dream about where we can find Scott. Or, like. Telepathy, you know. Teleportation. Telekinesis—"

Derek sighs, and leans forward to squeeze Stiles' fingers. "It's not a fairy tale to *me*," he sounds a little sarcastic. "It's just my life. Not. Not superpowers, or anything." For a moment they just sit there, staring at each other.

"It's superpowers, dude," Stiles assures him absently. He turns his wrist until they're palm to palm, toys with little black hairs on the backs of Derek's fingers, moves their joined hands slightly to the left, so they're not resting in a sticky spot. "You. Me. Dr. Strange." But while his mouth is moving, his brain has gone down a different track, and he scarcely hears Derek's soft huff of laughter.

He remembers a week or so ago, lying on his bed, missing Derek like a limb, afraid and worked up and *lonely*, and Derek reaching out to him through their bond. He thinks about how Derek said he used the bond to track him down at Lydia's. He thinks about the afternoon he spent sitting on the sofa, visualizing the pack bonds, *feeling* the pack bonds. If Scott is part of his pack...? Does he have to be a werewolf for it to work?

Stiles stands up with a clatter as the chair tips over. (He rights it without even thinking about it, it's such a common occurrence: just part of being *home*.) "Come on. Or. Huh. I'm gonna go *meditate*."

Derek's eyebrows indicate his every feeling of what the fuckery, crawling down and in towards the bridge of his nose, and his pink lips purse up in a field of stubble. Stiles smirks faintly and turns away, enjoying his sense of mystery. Yep, Derek is definitely following him to the main living area, still dark in spite of all the windows.

He pushes the coffee table to the side, drops a cushion in front of the couch, and then sits down cross-legged... because everyone knows that's how you do meditation. Derek has a judgemental

and vaguely confused air, but he stands back a little, waiting to see what Stiles is up to. Stiles gets caught staring at him, for a moment, fingers worrying at his collar, pulling it loose and letting it pop back, tongue caught between his teeth. After a completely vacant moment, he gives himself a little shake and then closes his eyes, straightens his back, and puts his hands on his knees.

He can hear Derek, who makes a soft sound of amusement, and the creak of the chair as he sits down for a front-row seat. He hopes this will work.

Deus Ex Machina, Sorta

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles straightens his back and places his palms on his knees. (He's not fool enough to try to hook the top of each foot over a thigh – he'd probably break something. Or many things: one quarter of human bones are in the feet, after all. That's 52 bones he could be cracking. No thanks.) He knows it's a little absurd, but a superstitious part of his brain desperately wants to cover *all* bases, and if striking a classic meditation pose will help in the slightest, then he will do it. He doesn't think Derek will judge, in spite of the fact that his resting face is the *judgiest of judges*.

His eyes twitch continually, under his squinched-up lids. This is the *antithesis* of what Stiles excels at, okay? Jesus. Sitting still and calming his mind. Yep. Not a single part of that comes naturally.

Upstairs, the betas are stirring: it's Saturday, so they can wake up slowly, and they appear to be taking full advantage of that, with sleepy sighs and much rolling and stretching. The loft smells of coffee, of brick that's been damp more than once over the years, of *pack*: wolfy and warm and welcoming... fur and sweat and various products. Derek's heart is right next to him, only barely faster than it is when he sleeps; and each deep thud of it, each powerful surge of blood as it squeezes and releases, is comforting. (Stiles slips onto a side-track for a moment thinking about what he must have heard in the womb, as a fetus. Probably sounded more ocean-y.)

He lets the rhythmic cadence anchor him, just thinks of himself as bobbing in the sluice of blood rushing through Derek's veins: warm with the expression of life. *Thud. Swish. Thud. Swish. Thud.* The coffee actually helps his attempted relaxation: it's always calmed him down and made him vaguely sleepy (which makes it even stupider when he uses it to try to wake up... but no one ever said Stiles didn't do dumb things).

Upstairs someone gets up and heads for the shower. When [*Koop Island Blues*](#) starts up, quiet and tinny from the speaker of a phone, Stiles knows he is hearing Boyd, whose taste in music defies prediction. Isaac grumbles sleepily, and Erica huffs and mumbles, "Get your hair out of my face," before their soft noises drop back into the quiet patterns of sleep.

And underneath it all is Derek's heart, strong and steady, a leather cord that binds them all like beads.

Derek stirs, and Stiles' eyes pop open. "What are you doing?" he asks, when he sees Derek turning on his phone.

"Texting your dad to let him know we're all safe. Sshhh. Don't mind me."

Stiles keeps his eyes open, fixed on Derek's face. Because it's beautiful, even in the unflattering light from over in the kitchen. Derek ignores him, which is thoughtful, because it allows Stiles to just stare. Hmm, this is actually much easier with his eyes open, lasering a path from him to his Alpha, his Dom. His... *lover*. Which is an appellation Stiles hadn't really ever conceived he'd grant anyone in *real life*.

So he watches Derek, who seems perfectly comfortable under his regard; glancing up at him occasionally, but otherwise reading his phone, expression serious and limned in reflected blue light.

Stiles blinks more and more slowly, until finally, between one blink and the next, the blue shirrs to gold. Stiles stretches it out with a lazy glance, gilt thread obediently following the command of his gaze, rooting itself to Derek's chest. (Derek does nothing in response to the invasion, so Stiles, in a far away place in his brain, figures he must be hallucinating or something.)

The sweep of Stiles' lashes causes the gossamer line of light to refract and sparkle, and his inhale draws it closer to himself, stretching across the space between them. As if the mere act of looking makes it appear, it strengthens and thickens, unfolding from Derek to Stiles' own sternum, unshakeable. He stays very still, barely breathing, watching this ethereal link, this glinting and fragile thread of magic. *Dom*, he names the heavy golden twist of it. *Alpha*, he designates the champagne sparkles at its edges. *Mate*, he bestows upon the warm rosy glow of its core.

The very air feels syrupy in his entranced state. His eyes move languorously from the lucent bond up to Derek's face: he continues to be absorbed in his phone. Everything feels like slow motion right now, but Stiles is too distracted to search for a measure in heartbeats or ticking clocks. He lifts a finger and *touches* the bond. He expects something like dental floss, but instead it feels like a warm cloud as he lets his finger drift through it: there is texture and – *presence*, hot and tingly – yet it still something not quite solid.

Okay, so that takes care of Derek.

Stiles shifts his focus upstairs, where the shower has turned off: Boyd, who is now girded in a cloud of [Röyksopp](#) (which is actually a nicely dramatic musical backdrop for Stiles' current metaphysical endeavor, and Stiles silently thanks him for the soundtrack).

Boyd, Stiles twists into his music, watching the sound lengthen into a delicate strand, dimmer than Derek's, but similarly warm. Erica and Isaac grow into being while Stiles braids his visual of their pack bonds, softer than Derek's, more like starlight, but steady and strong, for all that.

Stiles licks his lips, dimly aware that they've been drying out, his mouth stupidly gaping as he concentrates. Derek looks at him, and his presence feels... *gentle*... but with a great tsunami of force behind him, as though if unleashed, it would crash through anything before it, all to help Stiles should he ask for it.

Stiles stares back, but his brain is hardly engaged – incogitant – mouth dropping open once again. He's swimming through his thoughts – stoned, slow and dreamlike – his fingers rest over his heart. He'll find Dad next, and languidly reaches out, searching for that lifetime of strength and calm, for the powerful protector and his vast reservoir of love and acceptance. They've had their issues, but there is no one Stiles loves more deeply or in a more tangled fashion. His father is woven into his very fabric, there from his first drawn breath, helping him to mortar the blocks of himself as he built who he is over the years. Dad is a pillar. A keystone. The foundation to everything Stiles has ever been.

There.

That is easy, really. There he is, ribboning off towards the east and slowly lightening sky. This cord is somewhat more earthy than the others, recalling the tawny shade of skin and hair, the uniform he's worn for most of Stiles' life. Stiles feels along the length as it spills from his chest, buzzing gently under the pad of his finger. There is something curious about this bond, a faint tinge of steel blue, that makes Stiles think of gunmetal and Chris Argent, and he wrinkles his nose a little, deciding not to pursue that. (Ugh. His dad has a *sex life*, what even.)

Melissa takes a little longer, but she eventually fades in as Stiles dwells on her powdery scent and warm hugs, the deadly chilis in her enchiladas. Her bond is lilac, running next to his father's until it veers off only slightly, which makes sense, since she and Scott only live a few blocks away.

Scott.

Stiles' breath speeds up and his hands feel a little shaky. He'll find Scott. This will. This is *going to work*, holy jesus. Stiles tics a little, hand jerking up to sweep across his face and hair. Only one left to go, and Scott is definitely *pack*. Scott was pack before Stiles ever became a werewolf (er, – fox, werefox). Scott's been *his* since they were in kindergarten, and his bond should be there, as deeply embedded as his father's.

And then it doesn't take very long. Scott. Scott is goofy, and loving and loyal. He's generally selfless (and when he isn't, it's more accidental than anything else). He's amenable, he's a partner in crime, he's a bulwark and a flowing river, and he's been Stiles' brother for more than ten years. When Stiles stretches out his fingers, pushing against his breastbone, he pulls them away sticky with the essence of Scott, a bond that bounces and shivers and is moored in *fun* and *love*; in shared lunches and egging each other into bad ideas.

Buuzzz!

Stiles jolts so hard he bites his tongue. What? What? He clutches both hands to his chest, as if to hold his network of phantasmagoric links in place, *don't vanish, don't vanish, no* –

Derek's eyebrows draw in tightly, announcing their utter disapproval for the early-morning interruption. He rises and stalks to the door, slapping his hand on the intercom. "What."

Stiles would snicker, but his heart is beating too fast to allow him to see humor in the situation. Now that he's paying attention to his surroundings again, he can hear the heart down at the street door, but he can't place it.

"Derek. It's Alan Deaton. May I come up?"

Wait.

The *vet*???

Dr. Deaton strolls through the door that Derek is dubiously holding open as if it isn't strange at all that he's in Derek's loft at asscrack o'clock on a weekend morning. He holds a leather satchel in his hands and pauses when he's just inside the threshold. "Good morning, Derek. Good morning—" he pauses for a moment and then blinks, which Stiles thinks must herald confusion in his normally expressionless face. (He could use some Derek-eyebrows. Then he'd be *easy* to read.) There is no smell signature to go along with his expression, though: only the clinic, animals and medicines, and a soft incense that must be from his home. "-Stiles." He moves a few feet further inside, his bold scrutiny unnerving. "Have you been working magic this morning?"

Stiles jolts enough at the question that he winds up on his knees, instead of criss-cross (because never let it be said that Stiles can't startle *vertically*, okay, he is a *master* of the art of flailing, he can totally own that). He drops his jaw and gapes, speechless, and then looks plaintively at Derek.

Derek inhales deeply, mouth slightly opened to enhance any traces: his face is focused. "You can smell magic?" he asks Deaton.

"No," Deaton responds, finally moving into the living area and placing his satchel on the coffee table. "But I can sense its residue all around Stiles right now: he's bright with it." He straightens back up and clasps his hands behind his back. His intensity is disturbing, and Stiles feels a little underdressed for this conversation, what with the Darth Vader 'Who's Your Daddy' shirt and the worn-thin banana boxers. Not exactly attire for visitors. He scrambles to his feet and moves uncertainly towards Derek, who responds instantly to his burgeoning distress and closes the distance between them, scooping him in close to his side.

He nudges Derek sharply with his elbow and jerks his head at Deaton. *What the hell is he talking about?*

"He was trying to... um... visualize the pack bonds." Derek turns to Stiles, "Right?"

Stiles nods and spreads out his hands. Because what does that have to do with *magic*. Oh, fuck. His life is just going down the rabbit hole. It's only going to get weirder from here, he just knows it.

"And were you successful?" Deaton probes, lowering himself into the chair Derek had previously occupied without any evident regard for werewolfy propriety. "You are the Alpha Mate, after all."

Stiles shrugs, decides to ignore the bit about *Mate*, and then nods, wondering why he feels so reluctant to share that information.

"Hmmm," Deaton says. "Well, that's good to know."

Before anyone can say anything else, there's a clatter and rush of footsteps and the three betas come downstairs (in their various fashions: leaping, running, sedate).

"Did you say Stiles smells like *magic*?" Erica asks, skidding to a stop in front of Deaton. "*Our Stiles?*"

Boyd and Isaac quickly flank her, and here they all are, clustered in about six square feet of floor, once again. Wolves and their personal space issues. Deaton, unsurprisingly, handles it with equanimity.

"It clings to him," Deaton says. "I sense it... in a different way. I don't actually *smell* it. That's something you would do."

All the shifters in the room immediately drop open their mouths and begin huffing, leaning in towards Stiles. "I've got it," Derek says quietly, nose nearly in Stiles' neck. "It's... *electric*. Like a superheated wire." Oh, okay: Stiles can detect that.

Boyd makes a little noise of acknowledgement, and Erica unabashedly steps forward and pushes her face into Stiles' shoulder, sniffing vigorously. "Oh, yeah, okay. I can smell that." Isaac hangs

back, looking uncertain, so Stiles sighs and cocks his head at the other sub. Might as well make sure the *whole* pack knows. For whatever reason. Just. He doesn't want Isaac to feel left out.

Isaac melts into him, head falling loosely onto his shoulder as he snuffles. "Oh, okay. I've got it too," he says quietly, straightening up but not moving far. Derek reaches out with the hand around Stiles' shoulder and runs it through his hair and around his neck, to which he relaxes even more.

"Do I smell like magic when I access my pack bonds?" Derek asks curiously.

"You mean, can I sense it on *you*?" Deaton leans back and crosses one leg over the other. "No. Stiles is doing something different. Aren't you, Stiles?"

"Derek says he doesn't see anything when *he* does it," Stiles offers.

Surprisingly, Deaton smiles faintly. "I'd heard you were able to speak now, Stiles. Congratulations." There's a pause, because it's a weird thing to congratulate someone for. Deaton sails onward, unperturbed. "It's interesting, your magic. That's actually why I came over today, with Scott missing. I was thinking about it last night and thought you might try the pendulum, see if you can map him."

"But. Wait. *Magic!*"

Deaton holds up a hand to stop Erica from continuing. "I was aware when I first saw Stiles that there was something different about him, even beyond his fennec form." He turns to face Stiles directly. "You could hear my alarm, which would only be audible to someone with magic. Not to mention the fact that you seem to have intentionally – if subconsciously – selected a form that is more useful to you than that of a wolf. And Derek is correct in saying that bonds are usually felt, not seen."

Stiles said, "I didn't choose to be a teeny–"

Deaton scoffs, straddling the line between urbane and priggish. "We've already had this discussion, and I don't want to rehash it. I'm more worried about recovering my assistant at the moment."

Derek and Stiles drop down on the couch, and Isaac and Erica squeeze in next to them. Boyd sits smoothly on the floor, leaning into their legs. Deaton hitches himself forward and spreads a map of the area out on the table. "I had hoped you had a spark," he muses, as he weighs down the edges with small, varyingly colored crystals. "That you are using magic now, without any training, is more than I would have predicted." He pulls out his pendulum, a small teardrop of greenish quartz with a spiky rune inscribed in the black veins that run through it. It dangles from a short chain, and he sets it carefully in the center of the map.

Everything about Deaton is strangely muffled: his heartbeat, his pheromones, even the susurrus of skin and fabric against each other when he moves. Stiles reaches up and fingers the triskele that hangs from his collar, drawing comfort and stability from it. Derek reaches across his own chest to touch the back of Stiles' hand, stroking down with two fingers until he forms a firm clasp around Stiles' wrist. He didn't know he needed it until then, but Derek acting as an anchor helps to dispel the floaty-agitated-freefalling sensation he'd been feeling. He twists his hand a little, and Derek's fingers tense up around him, the arm around his shoulder pulling him closer. Stiles sighs and relaxes, held tight.

“What do I need to do?” he asks.

“Do you have a bond with Scott?” Deaton asks. His mask drops for only a moment, and he looks... hopeful.

“I. I was working on that right when you rang the buzzer,” Stiles answers. “I’d gotten to everyone else.”

Deaton makes a mute gesture, encompassing Derek and the betas. Stiles nods and says, “I could see my dad and Melissa, too.” Deaton’s eyebrows go up, but all he says is, “Why don’t you concentrate on Scott for a while, then?”

He settles back, as if prepared for a wait of some duration, and Stiles looks helplessly at Derek, whose eyebrows frown.

“Go get some coffee started for everyone,” Derek tells the betas. “Make breakfast, and let Stiles concentrate.”

Isaac and Boyd rise immediately. Erica pulls a quarrelsome face, but after a slight hesitation, complies as well. Stiles smiles at her gratefully, feeling like less of a sideshow when they turn away. Derek lets go of his wrist and pulls out his phone, going back to what he was reading with his one free hand. Giving Stiles space, even though he continues to hold him closely under his arm.

Stiles burrows into Derek’s side and shuts his eyes for a little while, trying to relax. He looks towards the windows, where the bonds for his father and Melissa had trailed, and thinks about that until they appear. It’s much faster the second time. He touches it wonderingly, amazed that this is something that is beyond normal werewolves, even. (*Normal. Ha!*) He plucks his father’s with a finger, and shivers as the vibration echoes up the cord and into his chest.

“Are you touching it, Stiles?” Deaton asks. His voice is very quiet, very unobtrusive, like a hypnotist might use to ask if you’ve fallen under their spell.

Stiles chokes on stifled, inappropriate laughter, because taken out of context, it sounds like second-rate porn. Then he frowns, because the person who would have appreciated that the most is Scott, and he’s not around to elbow and snicker. *Wink, wink. Nudge, nudge.*

So instead, Stiles nods, and Deaton hums, considering and enigmatic, and Stiles aborts an eye roll, shutting them instead. This whole scenario is setting Deaton up to be the guru to his grasshopper. He can’t help himself, and snorts out loud at that image, thinking again of Scott, who would totally share the joke.

From that thought, it’s as easy as falling to project his bond with Scott, because laughing, more than anything, is what Stiles most associates with his friend.

Scott’s bond is nearly black and... hispid: when Stiles moves to touch it, it cuts sharply against his finger, pushing, like the unruly edge of a raggedly opened tin can. The direction it follows is clear, but Stiles doesn’t say anything right away, because he’s paralyzed with the emotions coming across it, now that he’s manifested the link. His blood thunders in his ears, blocking out the steady breathing of his Alpha, the wordless murmur of the vet, the gurgle-and-drip of the distant coffee maker. His skin goes icy, lungs constricting, hardening to stone.

Terror. Pain. Confusion. Panic. Desperation.

Yes. That's Scott. And whatever is happening to him now is bad. *Very bad.*

Chapter End Notes

Here is a link to [Koop Island Blues](#), sweet reader. The video is pretty racy, I just discovered, so here's your warning about nsfw, just in case someone might accidentally look over your shoulder.

The second song Boyd listens to is [Sordid Affair](#), and Stiles is right, it's a fabulous soundtrack for this chapter. Röyksopp has always reminded me of Erica, who I can totally see singing [What Else Is There](#).

Sorry to be a day late: I had no internet yesterday. When Mr. Mojo, our household SysAdmin got home, it turned out all I needed to do was reboot. Oops! :D

ETA 11/20/17: My darlings... it is Thanksgiving week here in the States, and I will be hosting for 28 people on Friday, and there will be a house full of TEN from Wednesday until Sunday, and I am FREAKING OUT WITH STRESS. (Even though it's all family, and they're lovely and chill and bring food, cause I don't do formal.) The next chapter will be a showdown, and y'all deserve better than me just rushing through it. So I'm giving myself a two-week break, 'cause now it's time to go re-read the whole book to be sure I'm covering all my loose ends. I'll be back with you on 12/4.

Finding Scott... One Step Closer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stiles goes rigid, eyes wide and unseeing, and then, finger extended to touch some filament that Derek can't see, makes a soft, wounded noise. His breath comes out in a whoosh, and with it his scent spikes with the mordant burn of panic, unpleasantly comingling with waxy undertones of worry. Derek turns towards him instantly, one hand dropping to cradle the nape of his neck, the other reaching across his torso to pull him in, hand tight around fragile ribs.

"Stiles!" Derek says urgently, abhorring his mate's distress. "What—"

But Stiles interrupts him. "Scott's in trouble. Right now. *Derek*. He's. He's *hurt* and *afraid*, and we have to—"

He stops short, swallows loudly. He wrings his hands together, preventing his twitching fingers from clawing at his arm.

Deaton stirs, drawing their attention, and hands over the pendulum. "Then you should start now," he says, with nearly offensive sangfroid. "So that we may find him quickly."

Stiles nods jerkily and accepts the trinket, listening closely as Deaton explains the process. Derek, keeping his hand firm on the sub's neck, reassured by the way he pushes into Derek's gentle grasp, listens to Deaton with one ear, but keeps the other tuned to Stiles' heartbeat. It slowly settles, as his focus gives his panic an opportunity to subside.

Derek monitors Stiles much more closely than he appears to – a deliberate choice on his part, to spare Stiles the sensation of being put on the spot while he experiments with unfamiliar magics. Their only physical contact now is from the knee down, as Stiles has moved to perch on the edge of the sofa, leaning over the map, face screwed up into galvanized concentration. The arm that Deaton had explicitly instructed him to keep relaxed is vibrating with tension, and Derek hears his breath sucking in and out of his lungs twice as fast as it did when he was seeking out bonds.

Derek casually presses his calf closer to Stiles', deliberately sinking further back into the sofa cushions, transmitting *peace* and *relaxation*. Stiles broadcasts less panic, but now he is musty with stress and desperation, his full lips pressed into thin lines, the uptilt of his nose somehow less saucy than usual. Derek abandons nonchalance and returns his hand on the back of Stiles' neck, spanning it nearly from ear to ear. The skin under his palm feels cool, and Derek strokes it, warming it up. The velvet collar is soft and faintly fuzzy, a contrast to Stiles' smooth skin, the prickles at the base of his hairline.

"Settle down," Derek murmurs under his breath, audible only to Stiles. "Deaton said you can't force it. Focus on your bonds again. Focus on your anchor. You can't pick it up until you let it go."

Stiles turns an incredulous glare on him. "Really? Thanks, Mr. Miyagi. I'll just... wax on and off until I get there, huh?"

Derek looks at him blankly, because, *what?* Stiles rolls his eyes, but does smile a little. He raises his free hand and scrubs his face, and Derek tries not to think about how distracting his long fingers are, the little moles that peek out from between them. Stiles slumps back, nestling into Derek's side. "What's an anchor?"

Deaton looks directly at Derek with an eyebrow crooked in disapproval. Derek glares back. Right. Because clearly they've had nothing but time for training in Werewolf 101. "You. Obviously have one," he says slowly. "The full moon hasn't bothered you. You shift back and forth easily, now. Aggression doesn't seem to be much of an issue." He focuses on the ginger and citrus essence of Stiles, filling his nose and mouth, a succulent patina over the surface of his tongue. "Your anchor is... those thoughts that ground you, when you feel yourself losing control. Like. Your family. Your pack. I don't know. Your philosophy on balance in the world or whatever."

"My Dom?" Stiles suggests, very quietly, and now it's a private moment between the two of them, and no audience exists. "The thing that makes me feel safe? And happy? The one stable thing I can always find to hold onto?"

Derek shifts around to pull Stiles into his chest, ducking his head to gnaw a little at the taut muscle under Stiles' ear. He rubs up against the little gland there, stimulating the release of Stiles' scent along with his own, the mingled smell of them potent in the tight space between their heads and shoulders. Both of them just breathe it in for a few moments, their unique chemical signature. They are fixed against each other, bodies hot and attentive, lost in nothing more than the other... the sum of their selves.

"Yes," Derek whispers, fingers spread wide over Stiles' back, the side of his head. "That."

When they finally withdraw a little, Deaton is politely staring out the window, the betas talking quietly in the kitchen. Derek drags the side of his mouth against the corner of Stiles', thoroughly addicted, completely honed in on his mate, triumphant at the bright, grassy waft of stress relieved.

"I'll try again," Stiles murmurs roughly.

Derek remains plastered against his side this time, not pretending to be focused on anything else. He feels that Stiles would benefit more from his show of support rather than aloofness. He keeps his arm wrapped around Stiles' impossibly slim waist and goes quiet.

Stiles takes a deep breath and closes his eyes for a long moment before opening them and dangling the pendulum over the center of the Beacon County map. He starts to jerk the chain into a circle, and Derek slides two fingertips from his shoulder to his wrist, gripping it lightly. "Relax," he says. Quiet. Dom.

Stiles immediately slumps, tipping his head to push the crown of it against Derek's cheekbone. He murmurs, something indistinct, and straightens up again. This time he is composed and serene. His arm is still, his wrist loose, his agile fingers just barely pinching the chain.

The pendulum begins to swing in ever widening circles.

The faint smell of magic burgeons: petrichor and electricity. When Derek checks Stiles' face, it is slack, expressionless, mouth gently gaping, amber eyes darkening to black, half closed.

Deaton sits upright on the chair across the table. He appears unruffled, but his eyes burn bright with curiosity and captivation. One hand holds a fat red marker, ready to chase the pendulum on

the map, and Derek spares a moment to be grateful that the doctor hadn't pulled out a black Sharpie for the purpose.

Stiles breathing slows further, and his eyes close altogether. His fingertips around the chain are pressed so tightly that they're white at the tips. Or maybe not. Maybe they're... *glowing*? Stiles elbow bends, more smoothly than his perpetual lack of grace would suggest, and the circling pendulum glides above the map, moving from corner to corner, seeking. Derek imagines himself as a tether to Stiles' balloon. Pictures strength and support flowing from him to Stiles, through his arm, through his fingertips. Deep inside, in a place that's wordless, his heart beats something that might translate to *please, please, please*, although whether the sentiment is about locating Scott or just the hope that Stiles can find success is unclear. And moot.

After long minutes, Stiles' arm slowly ceases its roving, the pendulum tracing a circle just outside the Beacon Hills city limits. From the corner of his eye, Derek sees Erica and Boyd watching from the kitchen, Isaac peering silently over their shoulders. Finally, with a long sigh, Stiles becomes still. The pendulum lowers that last inch, point touching the paper of the map, making a tiny dent in the scribble of black and yellow denoting streets. Deaton swoops forward as soon as it touches, marker at the ready, and nudges the crystal aside to make a small dot, which he then surrounds with a circle.

"We've got it," he says quietly. Stiles opens his eyes slowly: they are glassy, dilated, dazed, and Derek has the sudden thought that they look post-coital, and catches his breath, chiding himself for the impulse to hide Stiles in this state, because no one has the right to see him like this except Derek himself.

" – got it?" Stiles repeats.

Erica darts into the room and totally ruins the mood by throwing herself at Stiles and giving him a big hug. "Yer a wizard, Harry!" she shrieks. Stiles jolts, and then huffs a laugh as he catches her. His eyes are clear again, his unique shade of light brown, and the ethereal air leaves him as if it had never been.

"Shut up," he mumbles, smiling. "Where's my wand, huh? Wait," he turns to Deaton. "*Do I get a wand?*"

Deaton rolls his eyes, but doesn't say anything, just taps the pen on the spot he's marked. "We should call your father," he says. "Once we're closer in, you can use your bond with Scott to narrow it down further."

"I texted them a while ago," Derek contributes. "They should be here any minute."

Stiles flashes him a bright, approving look, as if he's the smartest thing to sprout legs and climb out of the swamp, and Derek responds with a lifted brow instead of a grin, just because, well, you don't want to spend smiles too cheaply, do you.

But Stiles gets it, and grins back. "We're going to find him," he says, and draws in an unsteady breath. "We're going to find him. In, like," he glances at the map, "half an hour. We'll get him back." His fingers curl around the inert pendulum, and then he pulls both hands up to his chest, trying to hide how they shake. Derek just draws him in, and Erica hugs him hard from his other side, and Boyd and Isaac come closer, touching him on the head and shoulders, rumbling their comfort, and the pack lingers there for a long moment, just breathing, just *being*, appreciating the fact that they might be seeing the light at the end of a long tunnel.

John arrives only a few minutes later, Melissa in his wake, reeking of anxiety and exhaustion. Chris and Allison slip in soon after them, and they all huddle to make a plan.

“You can’t bring any officers,” Derek says. “For one thing, we may need to shift at some point. And for another, we have no idea what we’ll find. This can’t be on record. There can’t be... witnesses.”

John nods. “Yeah, that’s pretty clear.” He sighs, and briefly buries his face in his hands. “I never thought I’d find myself on this side of the law.” But then he looks at his son, and the love spilling off of him is crisp and piney and strong. “Then again. Werewolves.” He shakes his head. “We’ll just have to play it by ear.”

“We have to hurry, Dad. He’s. He’s *hurt*.” Stiles reaches out to touch his hand, which John immediately flips to wrap around Stiles’.

He squeezes hard, and smiles at his son. “Come on, kid. Let’s get Scott. And end this thing.”

They do not make a particularly subtle caravan: Derek and Stiles in the Camaro, taking the lead; the four adults following in Chris’s *I am a big bad hunter* SUV; Allison and the puppies crammed into Alison’s little Prius, taking the caboose position. (Derek is thankful that Lydia and her posse haven’t somehow figured out what is going on and joined up in Jackson’s ostentatious Porche.)

They don’t have much of a plan beyond *Find Scott and then come up with something based on where he is and what the supernaturals can overhear*, which is, evidently, sufficient.

Although it is mid-morning, the sky is dark with lowering clouds, threatening rain, the rare, isolated drop smacking the windshield with a crisp splat. Derek can feel the oppressive humidity, the pressure, the faint snap of electricity in the air heralding the approach of a heavy storm. They move through downtown, and the few people that Derek sees are hurrying down sidewalks with their heads down, as if they are tangentially steeped in the supernatural drama of the day.

Stiles’ hand slips under Derek’s elbow to grip his thigh – the closest he can get to holding hands, since Derek must regularly work the gearshift in the stop and go traffic. It takes less than 10 minutes to pass through the bustling downtown of the not-metropolis of Beacon Hills, and ten minutes after that, they reach the warehouse district to the south.

The houses they pass are derelict: 50-year-old dusty clapboard ranches squeezed in between random facilities whose purpose isn’t immediately clear. Derek glances at the map again, takes a left onto a cracked highway, another right, passes a small railroad yard. Trees and any vestige of landscaping slowly vanish, replaced by corrugated metal and brick, darkened and streaked concrete and pitted asphalt. Dead grasses and valiant weeds abound. One more turn, and they’ll be within the marked area. Derek pulls into an empty lot, and the rest of the caravan files in behind him.

John hops out of the SUV in the next heartbeat, almost before Chris has had a chance to come to a complete stop. Allison quickly follows him, and they crowd up around Derek's window.

Stiles leans across Derek to look at his dad, "You guys wait here, and I'll see what I can do to narrow it down to one building—"

"Using your... bond... thing?" John sounds rightfully skeptical.

Stiles grins, albeit weakly. "Hey, werewolves and magic, Dad. You gotta just go with the flow."

Allison rolls her eyes, and Derek commiserates with her reaction to the attempt at humor. "So we'll wait here for you to text us with an address?" she asks. They'd already set up a group text, so everyone could get in touch with everyone.

Stiles bobs his head, for once looking serious while he does it, instead of vaguely foolish. "Yeah. Now go on," he shoos them away, "let me focus. It's harder with people staring at me."

Derek assists their prompt departure by sliding his window up, and John and Allison go back to report to their various vehicles what's going on.

Stiles closes his eyes and calls up his bonds. This is the third or fourth time he's done it, and it's definitely easier with each attempt: easier to sink into his mind, to localize himself at his chest, to feel the weight and warmth of his pack bonds, to tease them apart into individuals. Each time he touches one of the network, he feels the pull grow stronger, and the emotional connection as well.

Here is Derek, vivid, concerned, filled with leashed energy and a brutal, tribal need to safeguard his pack. Here are the puppies, a little excited, a little trepidatious but also radiating a steady confidence in their Alpha. His father is much different, fierce in his worry, incisive in his sharp focus and determination to protect: it is almost frightening. There is Melissa, terribly anxious but ruthlessly forcing herself into calm; it makes Stiles think this is what she must be like in the E.R., focused on her task, not allowing her emotions to interfere with her job. And, surprisingly, here's the faintest trace of Chris, radiating the same relentless intensity and anger that John is. Stiles takes a moment to be surprised that he evidently considers Chris to be a part of his pack as well (Dad must be moving fast!) He wonders if Derek can feel him, too.

But all of this is vague, secondary to his sense of *Scott*. Scott's bond is salient: petrified and seething and in pain and, almost worst of all, drowning in a whirlpool of confusion. Stiles teases it out, blinks until he can see the strand of it, burning and sharp and... uncomfortable. Before they seek him out, before Stiles starts pointing out the direction of this bond so that Derek can follow, he has to try to calm his best friend down. Blindly, he weaves his fingers in with Derek's, drawing comfort, fortitude and a certain... magical *fuel*... from his mate, instinctively knowing it will make him stronger than he would be on his own. Then he rests his fingertip gently on the bond, feels it buzzing, oscillating on all the wrong frequencies, scraping jarringly across his nerves.

Calm, he pushes into it. *Solace*. *We are coming for you. We love you. You'll be safe, just hang in there.* He pulls from Derek, transmitting the Alpha's certainty, his emotional stability, his drive to

defend his pack. Stiles warms up... even his eyeballs feel warmer, filled with the energy of their attempt. He can *see* these assurances seep down the bond, can ascertain when they reach Scott, feels their calming effect slowly settle over Scott's fearfully tumultuous feelings. Good, this is good.

Dizzy, keeping his finger on the bond, he gestures to Derek to drive, pointing like a compass as Derek obediently, slowly, takes turn after turn.

It's only been a few minutes, when circling proves that Scott is in one particular block. There are two cars out front, a ubiquitous hunter SUV and a blue van marked for a handicapped passenger, with a wheelchair ramp. This must be the right place. Derek moves past a couple of buildings, to park safely out of sight. They text their location, and within minutes Chris and Allison pull in beside them.

John insists that Melissa wait at the cars, with Isaac and Deaton to protect her. Her movements are sharp, efficient – almost robotic – and her eyes are completely tense at the corners, her face nearly frozen in her stress. But she doesn't complain when John says, "I want you here, in the car, ready to drive, in case there's any need to get him... or *anyone*... to the hospital quickly. Deaton can drive: you sit in the back with your medkit. Okay, Melissa? I know it's hard, but you need to stay where we expect you to be: your role is important. Not to mention you're a civilian. Without experience, teeth or claws, I don't want to risk you. You'll be alright?"

Melissa shudders, and has to try twice before her mouth works. "You let me know the *instant* anything happens, John. The *instant*. You have to. *Find my son.*"

John leans forward and gives her a short, tight hug. "You think I don't know exactly what you're feeling right now, Melissa? You're our least trained fighter and our best medical asset. You're in the place where you'll do the most good. We'll have him back to you soon, I promise." Melissa dips her chin, acquiescing, but she wraps her hands tightly around her ribs, fingers biting into her jacket. Deaton murmurs agreement, taking the keys when Chris hands them off.

Isaac looks antsy, but settles when Derek puts a hand on his shoulder, slides it around to his neck and squeezes gently. "This is a good post for you," he murmurs. "They'll need werewolf strength and reflexes, in case anything happens: you'll be strong enough to carry anyone that needs it, and you know enough about defense to fight anyone off until the rest of us get here, if that should happen."

Isaac pops his claws. "I'm not afraid," he mutters. Derek smiles at him. "I know you're not, Isaac. That's why you're staying here."

Allison bounces impatiently on her toes, and her father glares at her before saying, "We need to know how many people are in there before we go rampaging in."

Stiles says, "Derek and I are best for that. We'll go listen, sniff anyone out."

Argent is at the back of his car, pulling out guns and other, more mysterious weapons. He arms himself as Allison grabs a crossbow and something like a dozen knives. (Stiles blinks in surprise, because such an arsenal disappearing around her princess-like person is dichotomous indeed.) John checks the placement of his personal revolver in his holster and carries a rifle under one arm. No one offers any guns to a shifter. Which is fine. Stiles isn't sure that Derek would know what to do with a gun if he had one, other than bend it into a pretzel so it could never be used against him. Teeth and claws are just fine.

John nods, reluctantly. “Come on, then, fall in.”

Their company slinks around the corner of the one building, darts across a graveled lot and lingers at a flimsy storage shed where the hunters’ cars are just visible. John wrinkles his nose at Stiles and Derek. “Can you scout without shifting?” he whispers.

In answer, Stiles winks and pops his fennec ears – Allison snorts at the sight, clearly new to her, and then covers her mouth with her hand, glancing guiltily at Derek, as if embarrassed to be caught acting so unprofessionally. Derek ignores her and twitches into his beta form. He and Stiles pick their way to the warehouse for reconnaissance while the others wait. It feels strange to be doing this during the day, although storm clouds have gathered so thickly that it’s nearly as dark as night. The wind and humidity make it difficult to scent, putting the building downwind, but they skulk around the cars, keeping a close eye on blackened windows, staying out of sight as much as they can. Derek’s heart pounds, caught in an adrenaline-fueled compulsion to be victorious, to do what they’ve planned and do it well enough that it will be successful; to take care of his pack, and, by extension, Stiles’. He can smell similar nerves emanating from Stiles, who is just behind him.

The hunters’ car is cool, lacking the smell of heat and exhaust that would mean it had been running in the past day or so. It is easy to identify both Laxmi and Baron on it: a strong smell of wolfsbane and weapons mixed with Laxmi’s shampoo and Baron’s sharp deodorant. They can pick up a faint residue of Scott as well, and maybe blood, maybe another person, but those smells aren’t nearly as saturated in the vehicle as its regular drivers. Stiles growls, frustrated, and Derek sympathizes.

Now the clouds let loose, and it begins to rain in earnest, bitingly cold, whipping sideways into their eyes and ears... and noses. They move over to the handicap van, but can’t pick up much. Inside, behind the front seat, Derek recognizes the satchel that Cecily uses for a bookbag, which hangs off the back of her chair: it has the little Totoro zipper charm and red dragon patch that personalizes it for her. There are random papers and some trash cluttering the passenger seat, so Derek assumes there was only the driver (her dad?) and herself in the van.

Lightning sizzles through the sky, and a clap of thunder makes Stiles jump and yelp, so Derek drags him in and claps a hand over his mouth, letting his eyebrows tell Stiles what a bad idea it is to make any unnecessary noise. Stiles shivers under his arm, and his eyelashes are stuck together in great wet clumps, his freshly sodden appearance making him strangely pixie-like (a figment enhanced by the gigantic white ears protruding, wetly, from his dark hair.) Derek tugs on one ear, because, irresistible, and then leads the way to the warehouse, so they can listen.

The glass doors in front are locked and the shades pulled closed: all the windows in front are covered in blinds, and the few set into the sides are blacked out. From here in the front they can only hear indistinct murmurs within. Stiles’ brow is furrowed, and he holds up three fingers.

“Three?” Derek asks quietly as he can, but loud enough to be heard over the rain, which makes a cacophony on the metal of the warehouse.

“Three heartbeats. I *think?* Maybe five. It’s really hard to tell what with all this racket,” he indicates the weather in general with a vague gesture.

Derek marvels at the sensitivity of Stiles' ears. He can barely hear actual *speaking* over the roar of driving rain. Stiles ears are directed at the wall, swiveling, raising and lowering as if trying to find the best stance for listening. He nudges Stiles, and they move further down the structure, circling it to get a better idea of where the people might be. At one point, Stiles reports (and Derek can vaguely hear) a possible conversation between a woman and man. They slowly skirt the large structure – it takes a little more than 5 minutes – doing their best, through the torrential and deafening rain, to locate everyone inside.

Derek can't hear or smell anything at this point, there's so much interference from the storm. Stiles, ears straining, says, "I hear... crackling? And someone coughed. A handful of heartbeats, maybe, but it's... difficult." He looks up at Derek, stressed and strained and apologetic.

Derek strokes down his head until he can grasp around the back of his neck. "It's fine," he says. "More than I can hear." He sighs, grips Stiles' shoulder as he shivers. "Let's get everyone else: we know enough."

"The huntress and Willis – probably – are about halfway down on the right side," Derek reports to John and Chris, while Allison and Erica and Boyd crowd up closely to hear as well. All of them huddle under an overhang of the next building over, watching dismally as the rain turns to sleet.

"Stiles thought he heard others, but wherever we were, the sound was consistently far away, so they're maybe in the center of the warehouse?"

Chris chews on the inside of his cheek, thinking. He and John both flick their eyes around the building and its environs in a professional, evaluating kind of way.

"No way to tell who's armed or what's happening, really. I mean, the hunters are always armed, but as for anyone else..."

"S'ok," Chris says. He scrapes his hand down his face, futilely sweeping away the rain. He turns to John, "Go in from the lobby, since they appear to be in the warehouse proper?"

"Yeah," John fingers his chin, eyes distant. "You three," he indicates Allison and the betas, "go to the back and hide where you can keep an eye on it, close as you can. Be ready for anyone to come out and do what you must to take them down. And *stay safe*." Allison, coldly professional, acknowledges this curtly, while Erica and Boyd look to her first before nodding.

"We'll go in from the front," he continues, indicating Chris. "Derek, you come behind us in whatever shape suits you best for fighting. Stiles," he reaches out to grip Stiles' chin, make sure there's eye contact, "you *stay behind us*. I want you waiting just inside the door, and I *don't* want you involved in any brawling, you hear me? You're our point person and communication: you need to stay where I can find you."

Stiles salutes, eyes wide and sincere, and Derek nearly snorts, because it's *obvious* what a bullshit show that is. Stiles, waiting. Yeah, right.

Chris gestures, then, and Allison leads the betas silently around to the back. Derek and Stiles follow John to the front, where Chris nudges him aside, muttering something about lock picking.

John stands over him, looking somewhere between impressed and unnerved, as he expertly and rapidly picks the three locks on the door. Chris tucks his tools back in his pocket and opens it, and the four of them slip inside, wiping rain off their faces and blinking in the near-dark.

They're in.

Chapter End Notes

Look at this, guys, we are on the doorstep of THE SHOWDOWN... at long last. Y'all have been so patient for it, and now it's RIGHT DOWN THAT HALLWAY, WOO HOO. Who's inside? What are they doing? If only they weren't in the middle of this gigantic noisy storm and could suss out a few more facts before they begin their battle....

Sorry about the weird POV shift in the middle. I literally didn't catch that until today, and it was either cut it entirely or rethink a lot, and I got lazy....

In other news: Thanks for your patience with my time off. I used my two-week vacay to have a nervous breakdown over family (who were actually lovely, as always), read over this story so far (wow, some of it is really good, I was reading Chapter 17 and actually got daunted, because it was *good*, and I don't think I'll be able to write that well *on command*... I'm not even sure how I did it in the first place. Aaarrggghh! But also: plot holes. More aarrrggghh!), and stress out over some contractors who kinda messed up my house and yard, ugh.

In other *other* news, tomorrow will be one year exactly since I collapsed with that aneurysm, and I just want to say how happy I am to have survived and to be here with you and to get to finish my story. Life without a spleen isn't noticeably different, and the doctors say I can't do contact sports so I don't rupture the other aneurysms, but that's a pretty easy thing to give up (lol). *mwah!* Kisses and hugs to all of you: I'm glad we can be together! (Also, just fyi, if I should keel over, Mr. Mojo has strict instructions to put up a post in my profile here and on Tumblr, so y'all would know. Cause I'm ghoulishly considerate like that.)

It All Comes Down to This

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's not much quieter inside than it was in the teeth of the storm. The warehouse is only one story, and the roof is made of the same corrugated metal as the walls, and there's a billowing, high-pitched roar as the rain pounds it. Stiles' fennec ears are folded down as much as he can contrive, because the raucous swell is literally painful. He blinks in the gloom, can feel the itch behind his eyeballs that indicates they've become black, and suddenly he can see much more clearly. They're in a little waiting room, nothing more than a moldy love seat and a couple of chairs next to a reception desk behind bullet-proof glass and another locked door. Chris heads straight for the inner door and jimmies it open in short order.

They don't have to worry about moving quietly – Stiles thinks they could possibly be doing vaudeville and still be drowned out by the tumultuous downpour. Another roll of thunder shakes the building, as if to agree with his assessment. The door leads them into a short, dark, musty-smelling hallway that opens up into a cavernous space. The warehouse proper is stocked with gigantic storage containers, some of them the size of railroad cars, and there are only a few gently swaying work lights overhead, struggling to penetrate the gloom. Stiles is thankful for the magic of his keen, nocturnal vision, which renders all the details in sharply etched shades of gray.

John nudges them to the right – the side where Stiles' exploration had placed Laxmi and the father – and the small group moves carefully around dusty crates. Soon enough, the wall juts inward to enclose what is clearly the warehouse office. Its interior windows are unblocked, and Stiles, swivelling his giant ears like satellite receivers, can make out the conversation within. What he sees from where he's standing is the back of a tall man, skin as dark as his (presumed) daughter, hair close-cropped and wearing a long, black woolen coat. Standing behind a desk, looking defensive, is Laxmi. She's wearing a business suit: severely cut jacket and trousers with a red blouse, buttoned high. She gleams with gold jewelry, and Stiles is shocked to see her this way, as if she is a different person from the one wearing camo and tank tops, hair tucked behind her ears and blood drying under her fingernails.

John takes another step forward, but Stiles whips out his hand, grabbing his father and holding tight. "Shhh, let me listen for a minute." He doubts that either of the humans could hear the conversation in the office, but he's pretty sure Derek can, even over the drumming rain.

" – have to say how thoroughly unimpressed I am by your choice of location. This place is dismal and dirty, and I brought my goddam daughter here for a medical procedure, and we've already had to sedate her just because of the panic induced by this creepy venue!"

"You don't understand, sir," Laxmi placates. "It's vital that we be hidden for this. Surely you didn't think it was *legal*, did you, you can't be that... naive. Not with a price tag like this."

"Of course I know it isn't legal," the man continues brusquely. His broad shoulders twitch aggressively, but although his voice is purring with danger, it's still got a deep, smooth Welsh accent that Stiles can't help but like, it sounds so much like Cecily. "What I *didn't* expect is that it would be a shoddy, back-alley operation. *Because of the price tag*. You people came highly recommended to me, and I frankly fail to see why—"

"It's because we get the job done," Laxmi snaps, lips curled into a snarl.

"*Get the job done?*" The man, Mr. Willis, hisses this incredulously. "Do you think I didn't see what you have out there? Two kids being tortured. I don't understand what the fuck is going on—"

"We told you, if your daughter turns, she'll heal from everything. You sat through the full demo, you watched the boy get bit and saw him change... how he healed, afterwards, when we cut him."

"Yes, and that's the only reason I haven't walked out of here yet. But that doesn't mean I don't recognize cruelty when I see it. For god's sake, those kids are being *electrocuted!* What's going to happen to them after this? How will my daughter ever—"

"*Sshhhtt,*" Laxmi cuts him off with a hissing, impatient noise. "You can't have it both ways. It isn't voluntary, *obviously*, and we have to deal with it as we must. If you don't like it, don't watch. We've set everything up: all you need to do is pay our last installment, and we'll get your daughter taken care of, and that's the only thing you need concern yourself with. I mean, *this is what you're paying us for*; for us to worry about the rest of it. Those animals out there don't deserve your sympathy anyway."

Mr. Willis looks to his left, possibly at his daughter, his expression twisted with ire and misgivings. His face is gently lined, he looks about Dad's age, with a light trace of grays in his black hair. His entire demeanor softens, presumably in response to his daughter, until he turns back to Laxmi.
"Animals, you say. And that's what Cecily will become."

Laxmi glares back at him. "I'm sorry, did you have a better solution? As far as I know, you're shelling out a million dollars precisely because *there are no other options*. We never guaranteed any kind of physical aesthetic to go with the cure, you know."

"But she won't always look that way—"

"You saw the boy before we strung him up. They can pass as human whenever they like. Undetectable vermin."

From the hidden corner of the room comes a mumbling, in a familiar voice: Cecily.

"*Dadi? Dadi*, I don't feel well. Wha—"

"Hush, *cariad bach*, hush. We're here to make you better, just like I promised."

"? I dunn, ah, whrrmmml? Don like this place—"

"Here, open your mouth, *cariad cyw*. Take this. It'll all be over soon."

Stiles stops listening and jerks his dad's ear close to his mouth. "There are three in there: Laxmi, Mr. Willis and Cecily. I don't know about weapons, but they're about to drug Cecily with something, I think. You need to go stop them. Derek and I will find Scott."

He doesn't wait for confirmation, just shoves his father towards the door of the inner office and then takes off running towards the center of the warehouse, Derek close on his heels. As they dodge around makeshift aisles and rickety shelves, the rain lets up as suddenly as it began, dwindling to a gentle shower, cutting the racket on the tin roof in half. Now Stiles can hear, much more unfettered, and it's easy to pinpoint breathing and heartbeats. Along with that, obvious in the

waning of the violent storm, comes the sound of crackling electricity. The olfactory mephitis of blood, fear and adrenaline grows thicker with every step. There is no longer a need to guess their route: the path forward is manifest with every sense Stiles possesses.

Around the final corner, Derek grabs his shoulder hard, pulling him slightly backwards, hissing, “Stop!” into his hair. “Don’t rush in. We need to check it out first.”

Stiles would not publicly characterize himself as an impulsive dumbass, but okay, he can admit upon reflection that *not* going in blind with guns blazing might be a good idea. Particularly since neither he nor Derek has a gun. They peer around the corner, Derek balanced slightly above Stiles, and just as they note Baron – as gigantic and Nordic as ever, made even bigger with the bulky leather jacket he wears – standing near a makeshift table, noise erupts from the office behind them: shouting, crashing furniture, a gunshot or three.

Stiles and Derek leap forward just as Baron turns around, lifting his arm and sighting down his weapon. Stiles snarls in a fury, uncaring, but Derek pivots to shove him out of the way, getting himself shot in lieu of his sub. Stiles roars, a thinner, higher sound than Derek’s mighty Alpha roar, but no less for all the rage and venom it holds. Derek staggers and goes down to one knee and Stiles vaults a couple of boxes and slides in just at Baron’s feet, kicking wildly out and snagging an ankle hard enough to make the man go down. Baron rolls, quick as a snake (or a 250-lb ninja) and grabs Stiles – *with his legs!* – flipping him over, smacking him down on seeping concrete hard enough to wind him.

Stiles doesn’t care. Because now that he’s past the corner, he can see a hideously familiar chain-link fence, sees Scott hanging from it, head dangling as if he’s not conscious. He’s shirtless, and his chest is smeared with blood. There’s a girl next to him, watching Stiles with the red eyes of an Alpha, fangs out and glistening as she fights silently against her chains.

But that doesn’t matter right now. Stiles rolls over and launches himself back at Baron, whose ham of a fist catches him across the shoulder and sets him spinning again. In his peripheral vision, he sees Derek stagger back upright, a zombie-like sight drenched in blood from a shot that appears to be have struck the side of his neck. Baron gets on one knee and motherfucking shoots *again*, and Derek goes down with a new hole in his chest.

But that gives Stiles time to jump on Baron’s back. He may not be super-fast or super-strong, but he’s just as wily as he’s ever been. He grabs the gun in Baron’s hand and *twists*, rolling himself with it, adding torque to his motion, and Baron has to let go. He knows he’s about to be tackled, but he’s got time enough to fling the gun as far away as he can before Baron grabs him again, by the ankle, and drags him backwards until another rock-like fist gets him in the side, along with a grunted, “You little *shit!*”

Stiles falls, cracking his head on the floor with a white flare of pain. A second or two may pass without anyone moving... he’s not actually sure.

Then there’s a terrible growl from behind him, and Stiles recognizes the sounds of popping bones and stretching muscle. Derek shifts fluidly into his wolf skin before he’s fully risen and leaps, slavering, straight at Baron’s head, little droplets of blood flying out around him like slow-mo in a cartoon. The big man has to let go of Stiles to grapple with the wolf. Stiles tries to catch his breath and make the room stop spinning, shivering in the flood of growls and snarls and barks, Baron growling and snarling and cursing back. He appears to sacrifice one leather-clad arm to Derek’s teeth so he can start punching over the wolf’s bullet wounds with the other.

Scott whimpers, seeming to come out of his daze, and the girl next to him howls, loud and long, and struggles mightily, rattling the fence with a fierce metallic clatter.

Stiles rolls to his hands and knees and doesn't spend *any* time staring at the floor, because this is a desperate moment. He staggers upright and looks around for Baron's gun while the brawling, grunting mass of fur and hunter roil against a crate. The gun is nowhere to be seen, but there's a familiar battery on the table set up near Scott, and Stiles snatches it up as quickly as he's able, jerking it free of its cables, scarcely noting the surcease of electric sizzle, and assiduously ignoring the discombobulating sense of *déjà vu*.

Derek hears him coming and executes some kind of stuntwolf-move, using Baron's arm as ballast, that results in the man kneeling with his back towards Stiles, who uses the opportunity presented to lift the battery and whack it with all his might down on those repellent blond hairs. They bloom with red very quickly, and Baron goes down in a nerveless heap, Derek spitting out his arm with a kind of hilarious look of lupine revulsion as soon as he's sure the man is down for the count.

At this point, Stiles would really like to just stop, snatch a moment to evaluate – himself, the situation, the chaos in the room. But there's no time for that, as the fence rattles again, Scott and the girl next to him making all kinds of commotion. Before he goes to them, though, he drops to his knees next to Derek, who has *at least* two bullet holes in him. “Are you okay?” he gasps.

Derek opens his red eyes and lolls his tongue out of a bloody jaw, giving him a wolfy grin. He nods and jerks his head at the two prisoners. His meaning is clear, and Stiles takes it in the spirit it's offered.

Chris races around the corner as soon as Stiles gets back to the fence. He takes the scene in at glance and stops to handcuff and shackle the hunter before stepping over to Derek. At that point, Stiles ignores him.

“Scott! Scott, are you okay?”

Scott looks dazed. His hair is a lank mess, his face filthy with remaining flakes of dried blood. His olive coloring has gone ashen, and there's blood soaked into the waist of his jeans, but Stiles doesn't see any cuts. Stiles leans forward, pressing his hand to Scott's cheek. “Buddy, are you there?”

Scott blinks, and a little life comes back into his eyes. He jerks at the fence, straining to get away, and Stiles pats his shoulder. “Gimme a minute, dude. I'll figure this out.”

Next to him, the girl, a very... rounded... redhead middle schooler, growls and her red eyes flash as she jerks her hands forward, ripping the fence attached to her manacles into flailing wires. She does the same with her feet and hurls herself to the ground.

“Hey—*hey* there, you,” Stiles jumps back, both hands in the air, placating as he can be. “Hi, we're here to help you, you know that, right?”

The girl looks at him and she's frantic and her eyes are wild and frankly he isn't confident that she isn't about to tear him to bits. She may look like she's barely fourteen, but Stiles doesn't doubt that she could easily do it. Derek staggers to his four feet and growls, low and warning, and Chris is suddenly holding a gun, pointed at her, and she seems to pick up on that. Stiles keeps talking, because, until recently, that's what he's been good at.

"Right, settle down there, missy, heh. Uh, sorry, was that disrespectful? I'm Stiles, and the wolfy one is Derek, and Chris, over there, and nobody wants to hurt you, okay? We. We came here to rescue Scott. But, you know, we're equal opportunity, and as for me, I'm always happy to rescue anyone who needs it, and that seems to fit you, so..."

The girl's eyes stay red, but her fangs and claws slowly recede. Stiles keeps one hand on Scott while he talks, so Scott will know he isn't being abandoned.

"You're an Alpha, huh? Another werewolf? That's great, you've got something in common with Derek, don't you?"

At this point, Derek shifts back into his skin, the full splendor of his nudity mitigated by the gory rivulets and smears of blood all across his body.

"*Shit, Derek-*"

Chris steps forward before Stiles can decide who needs him more, keeping his gun trained on the strange Alpha girl, but wedging his shoulder under Derek's good arm. "Wolfsbane?" he asks quietly.

Derek groans, but shakes his head. "I'm fine," he mutters.

Stiles scoffs, but frankly, he's seen Derek worse off and with a lot more holes, which, how gruesome is *that*? "Hey, alrighty then, everyone here is fine. Except Scott. Can someone help me get him down?"

The girl is next to him in the blink of an eye, casually ripping Scott free with a violence that's at odds with her petite, teenage appearance. Scott staggers, shaking his head, and Stiles immediately props him up with a full-bodied hug. "Oh, man, buddy," he says quietly into Scott's shoulder. "I was so scared."

Scott still doesn't answer, and strangely, the girl comes to support him on his other side. John comes in, looks around, and then pulls out his phone to send a mass text. Stiles assumes that everyone will convene in a moment. Now that things have finally taken a pause, he can feel the throbbing from his head, his shoulder, his side, his, well, basically, his everything. It's nothing compared to what happened to him in captivity, but it all hurts like a bitch, and it's hard to breathe, and he'd really rather be at home, tucked up in front of Netflix with a hairy boyfriend and some Doritos. Hmm, maybe he's a little dizzy, because the next thing he knows, Derek is plastered on his other side and there are voices in the warehouse, and then it's full of people, all chiming in to demand what happened, and Stiles is not a little overwhelmed.

Deaton and Melissa come in together, and Melissa immediately attacks Scott, pulling him away and checking him over. Deaton pulls up short when he sees the girl. "Have we met, Alpha-?"

The girl blinks at him. "McLeod," she says. "I don't know, I—"

Derek screws his eyebrows into a *V*. "I'm Alpha Hale," he says, when she doesn't finish her thought. "Derek."

"Oh!" She suddenly relaxes. "I've heard of you. I. Um. Our parents had a treaty. I'm Bertie." Derek nods. They don't shake hands, but the atmosphere goes slightly less tense. John and Chris

are conferring about the hunters, Erica and Boyd stiffly stand guard around the perimeter, and Isaac twitches near Derek, as if he really wants to fix him, or at least clean up the blood.

Allison pushes past her father, folding her bow and stowing it under her jacket. “Scott, oh, god, Scott, you’re okay!” She lights up, incandescent in her joy and relief, and Scott beams similarly back at her. She rushes towards him, but Stiles sticks out an arm and reels her in before she can reach him.

“Hold on, Ally-girl. Let his mom do the check-up—” but he doesn’t get a chance to finish, because Scott *roars*, jesus christ, and his eyes glow yellow and he *leaps* at Stiles before anyone can move. And here is Stiles’ best friend from childhood, claws crooked, wolfed out, ready to kill, all light of reason gone in his eyes, and Stiles thinks, *Oh, of course, that’s why they had him on the fence...* because, you know, *he’s a werewolf now* and has long enough to regret that he hadn’t noticed a beta form earlier because it might have given him some context, before Scott bowls him over, jerking him free of Allison, and sinking his claws into lines of fire along Stiles’ sides.

He opens his mouth, fangs *right there in Stiles’ face* when there are twin roars behind him and Scott is ripped off Stiles and sucked into a vortex of snarling limbs and, whoa, way too much skin for a public gathering, and maybe it should be funny to see Scott taken to task by a naked man and a redhead kid, but suddenly Stiles is distracted by the burning pain, and drops his head, which smacks into the fucking floor *again*, and he closes his eyes just as Isaac and his dad come into his field of view and then it’s just a little too much trouble to open them again.

He does, of course. Open his eyes, that is. It’s only a few minutes later, but apparently Scott-the-new-werewolf (ha, a werewolf born in a *warehouse*, that’s priceless, he’ll have to share that with his friend later) has been subdued. Melissa is still administering some kind of field medicine to Stiles’ cuts and bruises, since apparently Scott doesn’t have any. (And fucking *hell*, how fair is it that Scott accidentally becomes a better werewolf than Stiles did when he set it up all on *purpose*? So Scott is healed, Derek is nigh on healed, and Stiles is still bleeding with a concussion. Yeah, world’s obviously equitable.

In a corner, Dad and Chris are having a very... *menacing*... conversation with Laxmi and Baron. Stiles picks up enough to know that the pair are being threatened with the collective fury of the entire hunting community and basically the annihilation of anyone they’ve ever held dear if they don’t settle the fuck down and face the music like the kidnapping, torturing, sadistic menaces to society that they are. Chris mentions that his basement is up to the task of containing them until a hunter council panel is set up.

Stiles and the others are instructed to go *straight home*, and he’s to be put to bed and fed soup and basically pampered – in a quiet, controlled, *safe environment, Stiles!* – until his dad can get back home and then yell at him and rough him up some for getting hurt again. As Stiles interprets it.

Derek helps him out to the car, ignoring Stiles’ protests that he’s not a damsel and he can walk fine on his own. However, he doesn’t complain about the continuous pain drain Derek keeps up, black veins trailing down his forearm from where his hand wraps around Stiles’ neck. It’s too much of a relief. And maybe, after the past half an hour, Stiles has earned a little inebriation. He squirms away long enough to give Scott a big hug before he leaves, though, so he’ll understand that Stiles

won't hold a grudge. What's a little mauling between besties, after all; and werewolf instincts are really strong, and Scott shouldn't expect to have learned to control them yet.

Chris is on standby to jab Scott with a wolfsbane sedative if he has to, but he swears he can hold it in as long as no one touches him when he's not expecting it. (Or Allison.) Melissa has a firm hand on his shoulder, and Allison gives him a truly filthy kiss before she backs away, making him swear he'd call her as soon as he gets home. Bertie McLeod flashes her red eyes at Derek before they leave, subtly reassuring him that she's on the Scott case and he won't have an opportunity to act out again.

Deaton has gathered the Willises and will stay with them at the clinic until John and Chris are free to go interrogate the man. He assures them that he can safely monitor the narcotized girl until the morning. Stiles contributes that Mr. Willis knew that he was asking for a werewolf bite for his daughter, but seemed honestly ignorant of how the hunters were going about it, what with all the kidnapping and torture and all. Deaton appears confident that he can keep them in line until tomorrow.

Stiles is glad that Cecily will be with a doctor, even if he is a vet, because she still seems so severely tranquilized that she obviously isn't really taking anything in. He takes her hand briefly, on the way out, and it is utterly limp, doesn't squeeze back. Her whole arm dangles like a noodle between his hand and her shoulder. It's kind of scary to feel: too... heavy. Too floppy. She does say *Stiles*, and blinks a few times, but then her mouth turns down in a frown. "I won't get better," she sighs. "And I'm not ready to go yet, it'll make *Tad* so sad." Stiles clutches her hand between both of his own, says they wouldn't let that happen.

Finally, finally, he allows himself to be bundled into Derek's car and delivered into his home, his jammies, fed soup and Doritos, given a few stitches and bandages from Melissa when she drops by in what may or may not be a dream. He demands and receives all the Alpha snuggles he could hope for, is mojo'd to the point where he can't even remember where he was hurt and won't stop giggling, blearily notices his dad come home to check on him before leaving again, and is more or less cuddled into falling asleep, so, and lies dead to the world through the remainder of the day and clear through the night.

Chapter End Notes

There! How was that for a showdown? It's pretty straightforward, and I struggled a little bit with making it so easy, since, you know, proper adventure formula requires that our heros THINK they made it but then EVEN MORE SHIT STARTS RAINING DOWN. But, eh. 175k words. I feel like we could use something uncomplicated. Only 3 more chapters to go, my loves, isn't that nuts? I don't know about y'all, but me, I can't believe it: I keep waiting for some kind of shoe to drop.

The Welsh is basically just Mr. Willis calling Cecily his sweet little girl. And the joke about a warehouse spawning a werewolf is shamelessly lifted from [Stiles Stilinski and the Societas Draconistrarum](#) by [Green](#), which I reced back when I was on a dragon au kick, and if you haven't read it, you should. (Thank you, Green!)

I was thinking about underappreciated fics lately, so here are a few I've loved that have less than 100 bookmarks: [**The Demon Barber of Maple Avenue**](#) by [heyshalina](#), [marshmallowfluff](#), which is HILARIOUS, y'all. Doesn't matter if you know anything about Sweeney Todd, that's irrelevant. Stiles is just such a hoot, bless 'im. [**A Hundred Echoes**](#) by [hunters_retreat](#) is spooky, featuring Stiles developing a weird kind of dream empathy, especially with Derek... until Derek's violent/self-loathing dreams start putting Stiles in very real danger. (I'm a sucker for empath!Stiles.) [**Into the Woods**](#) by [KrisEleven](#) which can be summed up with this gem: "*He put back the second can of bear mace after some deliberation. If that many bears attacked him, he would be dealing with some deeper issues.*" [**The Time Stiles Totally Knew What He Was Doing**](#) by [otatop](#) which is very, very short, but a total laugh. And [**Fasten You to Me**](#) by [nubianamy](#), which I adore and have actually already reced, I'm pretty sure. And here are [even more](#): a list I made over on tumblr.

Aftermath

Chapter Notes

I hope y'all enjoy this as much as I did ;D
(And thank you for all your lovely comments in the last chapter: I'm so glad it worked for you!)
And also, Happy New Year!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Derek dreams.

He knows he's dreaming, not only because of the way things fade in and out, but because of the strong sense of having been here before. Derek dreams of running, paws silent in the humus of the forest. Golden light sifts through green leaves, dappling the ground below, and Derek darts between tree trunks and bounds over a small creek. His pack is behind him, yipping and howling in their play. Another runs beside him: his mate, energetic and shrieking a joyful challenge, dashing away just to return with a head-butt, in a laughable attempt to bowl him over. Derek doesn't fall, of course, but chases his mate through some brambles and around a large boulder before catching him, delighting in the hunt.

Yes, he's been here before. But this time his mate is a fennec fox, rather than a starveling wolf. Everything feels so much more real, richer in hue and passion: robust like a memory, rather than a dream.

Derek has his fox pinned under one paw, while Stiles wriggles and gnaws at his toes, growling when he isn't laughing, tongue lolling from the side of his mouth. His black eyes sparkle, and his insanely large ears catch the light so that they turn pink and lucent. He pushes Derek's foot away and hops onto his back, stabilizing himself with his back legs just in the dip between Derek's shoulders and his front paws delicate on top of Derek's head, peeking out between his ears. The little white body vibrates with Stiles' purr, and Derek carefully lies down, resting his head on his forelegs, rumbling in return.

The sun is warm; shadow and light play across the forest floor as a breeze makes leafy branches dance. He breathes in deeply, noting loam, sap and chlorophyll, the clear sharp scent of water from the nearby brook, the warm, bergamot-citrus of his mate. Derek lets his eyelids droop low: he has no sense of danger, only of contentment.

As they rest, the pack approaches, settling down around their Alphas, panting more and more slowly as they recover from their play. There are wolves and humans, leaning against one another in harmony. Derek doesn't count, but there are many: far more than his original pack of four. He and Stiles survey their people, and it is good.

Derek wakes up feeling warm and serene, but it doesn't last for long, as his ears tune in to the hitching breaths beside him. He can smell pain, slipping in tendrils through the air, a sour, skunk-like mordancy. Stiles whimpers, and his head moves restlessly on the pillow. They are both human this morning, and alone, the pups having gone home to their families and John having left for work over an hour earlier. Derek lifts on one elbow and gently puts his hand around Stiles' shoulder, moving slowly to his neck.

"Stiles," he murmurs, as the blackened manifestation of Stiles pain wreathes up his arm. "You awake?"

Stiles opens his eyes, slitted so that Derek can barely see them. "Whazzt?"

Derek continues to draw pain, pulling harder than he perhaps ought to, angry because Stiles got hurt yesterday. Derek's own wounds had completely healed up before they'd had a late lunch, and it's unfair that Stiles' must be so slow: Derek feels like he's failed him, as the Alpha who gave the bite.

Stiles hums and sleepily traces the dark veins of Derek's arm with two fingers. All tension leaves his body, and he shifts to a quiet, sustained purr as the discomfort Derek leeches from him decreases. His eyes are shadowed, colorless in the dull gray light coming through his window, but have a liquid gleam as they hold Derek's. Stiles' mouth parts into a goofy grin, and he now exudes euphoria in crisp cardamom instead of discomfort. "Drreek—"

He flops his arm up and smacks into Derek's face in what was probably intended to be a pat.

"Oops." He giggles.

Hmmmm. Derek may have overdone it. Derek huffs a quiet laugh and stops trying to siphon off pain: it's gone now. "Morning, Dopey. Don't move too much: just because you're not hurting doesn't mean you're not still injured." He frowns at the thought, and Stiles drunkenly maneuvers his hand through the air until he can rub away the line between Derek's eyebrows and smoosh his face into a smile.

"Don' be such *sourwolf*, you. Not'so bad."

"You're totally stoned right now, aren't you?"

Stiles grins, and it's a literal ray of sunshine, seriously, the whole room lights up. He wiggles his fingers and then throws his arms out. "*Behold th'wolf mojo,*" he intones. Ridiculous pup.

Derek catches his arms and presses them down to the bed. "Injuries," he points out. "You're clawed up along your ribs. *Thirteen stitches*, Stiles. And bruising, and Melissa thinks you probably have a concussion, too."

Stiles rolls his eyes. "M'feelin' better now."

Derek pulls away the sheets to check. The clawed skin is hidden in bandages, but it's true that the black bruises from yesterday along his chest and side from being struck by Baron have faded to a more purply-green. The same with the one on the side of his face, and the swelling's gone down

enough that he's nearly symmetrical. "You're healing faster than you did before," he observes, caressing the livid skin.

Stiles smirks. "Been eating my veggies."

Derek nods. He's been eating *at all* - which still makes Derek amazed and relieved - and sleeping, and not terrified, and all those have to factor in. Good. Hopefully, this will all be healed in a day or two, then. He carefully peels back one bandage, and what had been a deep cut only yesterday is now a joined line: crusted with scab, yes, but the neat stitches are obviously superfluous. (He'll take those out in the shower.)

Things devolve beyond words, then, because Stiles is staring up at him with his gorgeous eyes, eyelashes a dark frame, saucy nose wrinkling in laughter, and Derek has to lean down and kiss him. Stiles' pouty lips feel as cushiony as they look, and it only takes a few assiduous swipes to overcome the gluey stink of morning breath, to render Stiles' mouth hot and slick and *eager*.

Careful of his bruised cheek, Derek slides his hand down to wrap it around Stiles' neck, toying with his collar, thinking wordless, joyful, possessive thoughts about how it's *his*, and how it marks Stiles, and how this is *his* sub, *his* mate, the partner he'd never thought to dream of, and it's so. damn. good.

Stiles appears to think so as well, a continuous stream of assenting moans and murmurs, interspersed with non-vocal purrs, keep his lips vibrating under Derek's, and his tongue enthusiastically chases Derek's own, licking at his lips and teeth; Stiles' hands, long-fingered and cool, clutch around his shoulders before slipping down to his biceps.

Derek leans in closer, pressing his chest lightly against Stiles' own, gentle enough not to aggravate any bruises, but sufficient to hold him down a little, and Stiles stops kissing to gasp, shuddering under the careful weight of Derek's body, and his hands tighten until the sharp corners of his fingernails dig into flesh. His hips twitch upwards just as his eyes fly open.

Outside the house are the normal sounds of a small city going about its day: rumbling car engines, irritable honking, the occasional shout of a pedestrian, sirens from the fire station a few blocks away. To Derek's ears, none of them are as loud as the thunder of Stiles' heart, the windy rush of his breath, the shushing of skin on cotton as he squirms on the sheets. Derek pulls back, ignoring Stiles sulky mewl of protest, because he wants to *look*, wants to etch this vision of Stiles into his memory forever, there on his childhood bed, alive and breathing, pupils huge with desire and cheeks rouged with arousal.

Derek kneels, catches Stiles' wrists as they fall from their perch and, careful not to unduly stretch his ribs, folds them above his head, pushed down into the pillow. Stiles stops whining his complaint and goes silent, still, regards Derek now with an edge, alert and anticipatory. Derek bares his teeth in answer, not a smile, something more predatory; and Stiles watches and waits, heart pounding, and the scent of him transitions from lazy, early-morning arousal to musk-soaked lust and an intoxicating, galvanizing submission.

Both of them are undressed down to their underwear, having gotten hot during their 16-hour bed rest, and that's still too much clothing for Derek's intentions. He shifts his hold on Stiles so that he has one hand free to trail down Stiles' neck and chest, stopping to tug gently at the arrow of hair vanishing into his boxers. "Alright?" he questions gruffly. Stiles is fully hard behind the thin cotton, and his penis jumps at the query. He lifts his hips impatiently in response, and Derek swiftly peels him bare.

Stiles' cock, just this side of slender, curves subtly to the right, a pretty red contrasting with his pale skin. Derek cards his fingers through wiry hair, pushing down on a round mole like it might be a button to something unknown (it isn't, but it's fun to focus on, regardless). Stiles' cock flexes again, Derek sees his stomach muscles tighten behind it, enough to know that the jump was voluntary: his boy is trying to give him a hint, hurry him along. Contrarily, Derek moves back a little, squeezing Stiles' wrists in his left hand. His right, he scoops gently in the small of Stiles' back, just below the bandages, and slides slowly between blood-hot skin and the mattress. He lets his fingertips find Stiles' crack, and moves until his palm cups a full cheek, before squeezing briskly, not too gentle.

Stiles grunts a little, pushes into his hand. Derek swings over him, keeping both hands where they are, nudging Stiles' legs apart with his knees to make a place for himself, pushing him back to the mattress when he arches himself upward, trying to touch. "No," he says calmly. "My turn."

"What. Do you—"

Derek thinks of interrupting him, thinks of telling him to be silent, but couldn't stomach such a thing: Stiles has been silent for too long. Instead, he nudges himself forward until the tip of his erection just nudges against Stiles' scrotum. "Are you asking what I plan to do?" he supplies, when Stiles doesn't continue.

Stiles just nods. His cheeks have flushed higher, and this mark of excitement sifts down his neck and across his chest and shoulders. Well, even without the smell, that establishes his enthusiasm. But Derek will answer regardless, because he's aware that Stiles is dealing with trauma: both from yesterday and from the long captivity, although they are different kinds of trauma, to be sure.

"I'm going to kiss you everywhere," he murmurs, maintaining eye contact and enjoying the way what he says makes Stiles twitch in his hands. "I'm going to put my face right there, between your legs, and get high off the smell of you. I'm going to suck you off, then, but nothing more, because you're injured and I don't want to hurt you."

"And when you're better, Stiles. I really, *really* want to lick you open, finger you until you're so relaxed you can fit me, and then I want to fuck you. And when you can take me inside, easy, when you love it, then I'm gonna do it again, and this time I'll knot you, because you're *mine*: my mate and my sub, and I want nothing more than to wrap you up in a tight net of rope and roll you over and lock your body to mine until you're so dizzy with pleasure that you can't even tell what you're lying on."

"Ohmygod," Stiles breathes, straining towards him again, pushing down to chase the contact between Derek's cock and his balls. "Ohmygod, Derek, I wan' –"

And then, "Wait..."

"Wha-?"

Derek just waits, lets it filter through. It isn't really Stiles' fault he'd accidentally mojo-whammed the poor boy's brains into something less than supremely functional. (The concussion probably doesn't help, either.) He does scoot forward a little more, lets his fingers dip fully into the crevice of Stiles' ass, pushes his cock until it glides alongside Stiles', which is clearly distracting for the young man, who struggles to keep himself from bliss long enough to have a coherent conversation.

"What d'ya mean, *knot*. What."

"I'm an Alpha werewolf, baby. Means I've got a knot, means there's a part at the base of my dick that swells up when I'm with my mate, gets bigger once it's inside you, holds me there while I fill you up with come." He leans down quick, before Stiles can get apprehensive (although he doesn't *smell* nervous, he smells excited). "It'll swell about a third of the way up my shaft, sweet boy, and you know where that puts it, when I'm inside you? Right at your prostate. It's gonna feel *so good*, pushing all along your hot spot; god, Stiles, I can't wait to share that with you."

Stiles wraps his legs around Derek's hips and jerks them together, trying to haul Derek in closer. His musk is peppery, earthy, makes Derek salivate with hunger. "Fuck, Derek, *fuck*. A. A knot. Like a dog?"

Derek growls and tightens his grip until he can hear the bones of Stiles' wrists grinding against each other.

"Like a *wolf*, sweetheart." He releases Stiles' arms and pulls back enough to get his face down near Stiles' erection, scooping both hands under his ass, biting at the ridge of his hips, breathing into the curls at his pubis and chuckling when Stiles groans and twists in his hands. He lifts Stiles to his mouth, just a few inches off the bed, and sucks him in, chasing down the curve of him, sucking harder each time Stiles shivers, not going for finesse but rather forceful, everything edgy and hard, and he can hear the blood rushing into Stiles' cock, can feel the pounding of his pulse through the forefinger he's got planted on his asshole.

Stiles writhes and cries out, in pleasure rather than pain, but Derek lifts up with a frown. "*Stay still*," he commands, and Stiles gasps at the instruction, eyes going larger still, and Derek smirks, full of his own power and the taste of his lover, before he swallows him down again.

"Derek, Derek..." Stiles grabs his hair and tugs him away, so they can look at one another. "Can you. Would you. Um."

Derek eels upward, props himself on his elbows, spanning Stiles' shoulders, and looks down at him. "What do you want, baby?"

Stiles bites his lip, and the spot pressed under his teeth turns white with pressure, so Derek tugs it free, dipping down for a kiss or three. "What do you want?"

Stiles sighs, and contained in it is his early morning relaxation, the endorphins from the pain drain, the reveling in his own arousal: he sounds more euphoric than trepidatious when he finally blurts out, "Can you fuck me... now? Can you do all that *now*... the stuff you said? *Please*."

Fucking hell. How is a man supposed to take that? Derek wants to throw him down and ravish him right then, and damn all his fine plans. He's tired of pulling back when Stiles asks to go further, dammit, he's only got so much restraint, and maybe he hasn't been doing Stiles' recovery any favors anyway.

"You're hurt."

"No I'm not. I mean. Nothing hurts right now. And. And. You can be careful, right? Not to. Tear any stitches or anything. You can. What if it's just the tip? Just the tip?"

Oooh, fuck. Derek needs to dig in and find some control and do it *right now*.

It only takes him a moment to come up with a plan, a schedule of events, as it were. He shivers at the thought that it will be about controlling himself as tightly as he'll have to control Stiles. He leans down, pressing his chest over Stiles' once again, feeling the rough scratch of bandage and tape under the weight of his body. *Just the tip.* "I can work with that," he rasps. "Your chest is alright, and so is your back. If we can just keep you straight..."

He maneuvers Stiles carefully until he's stretched on his stomach, watching as Stiles gingerly lifts his arms to cross them under a cheek. "I'll only do this if you stay still for me. Can you do that?"

Stiles nods a bit frantically, and Derek allows himself an unseen grin. "That's very good," he whispers. "Just what I want. Look at you. You're so beautiful."

Stiles blushes harder and grimaces into his inner elbow. He mumbles something that may or may not be *yeah, right*, and Derek growls at him, grabbing the back of his neck and squeezing hard. "If I say you're beautiful, then you're beautiful. No backtalk."

Stiles twists his head around enough to look at Derek with some degree of disbelief. "Uh. If you wanted no backtalk, then maybe I'm not the right sub for you."

Derek grins, delighted. "No sass when I give you compliments, then. Because I won't let anyone insult my mate."

Stiles' eyes squinch into happy moons. "Okay," he mumbles to his elbow, hiding his flush.

Stiles' back is long and lissome, his spine a pronounced groove that enhances each curve and dip. Derek swiftly discards his underwear before he swings a leg over, parking himself just below the luscious round of Stiles' ass, and leans down on a hand he plants next to Stiles' shoulder. The movement presses the length of his cock into the divide of buttocks, and Derek lets his weight drop further, just to hear Stiles gasp, to watch the tide of goosebumps across his skin.

His cock is thick, dark red against Stiles' pale coloring, looks huge lying atop such narrow hips, and the black scrub of Derek's pubic hair makes him an obscene contrast. He growls, viciously suppressing his desire to take *right. now.* Gods, but he wants to *wreck* this boy. "You belong to *me*," he whispers, pumping his hips to move himself in a slow drag across Stiles' skin. He bends his back to speak to the ginger-warm pocket of scent behind Stiles' ear. "You take what I give you," he pauses to bite at the lobe, and Stiles' groans beneath him, and the sharp clean anise of excitement rises through syrupy arousal, sexual musk.

He fumbles at the nightstand, pulls out the slim length of hemp they often used for school, grabs a bottle of lube as well, dropping it near Stiles' waist. "Lift your head," he commands, and Stiles does with alacrity, with a shiver and a quiet sigh. Derek ties his folded arms, wrist to elbow, without finesse, and marvels at how Stiles relaxes with each twist of rope.

When Stiles lays his head back down, he rubs his cheek against the bindings, and Derek has to lean around to kiss him, capture languid lips, breathe his breath, drink him in. "So beautiful..." he murmurs as he drags himself away, noses at the velvet collar, kisses a line down Stiles' back, rests his mouth and nose in the meridian of Stiles' ass, sybaritically goading the drawn out moan Stiles makes when Derek exhales into his skin.

He lingers there for a moment, a tease to hear Stiles' breathing pick up, the birth of a whimper, before he opens Stiles' legs, pushing his knee up and out, and pulls his cheeks apart.

Derek holds too tightly, he knows, and his fingerprints will be bruises tomorrow, but he's swimming in a sea of Stiles' arousal, heady and warm and provoking, and he knows he isn't doing anything that Stiles doesn't want.

And there he is, exposed to Derek's devouring gaze, pink and twitching and vulnerable. And Derek does as he promised, diving in: he rims the boy until he's mewling, restless, desperate. Derek won't let him lift his hips, although he keeps trying, cognizant of the shallow wounds on his sides. But he does scoop his cock backwards, so that it points down the bed at him, and laves everything his tongue can reach, moving between frenulum and testicles, asshole and slit, burning a red flush onto pale skin with the bristles on his jaw.

Stiles jolts and bucks beneath him, even growls in his effort to launch himself up into a proper presentation, and Derek draws back to smack him across one cheek. He pulls the slight sting immediately, vanishes it in a faint gray tint of veins along his forearm, but Stiles writhes and groans and tugs at his bonds and says, "*Fuck me, you... bastard*," which makes Derek laugh, and he lifts up to squeeze lube on his fingers, and across Stiles' hole, smirking when he squeaks because of the chill.

He just slides his finger right in, Stiles is that relaxed from his earlier attentions, so he quickly moves on to two, driving them in and out at a quick pace, rubs until the bump of his prostate emerges and then toys with that until sweat has gathered at the small of Stiles' back. Derek adds another finger when he dips down to lick it up – salt and mineral and musk – and Stiles pants beneath him, wordless now.

For a moment, Derek lets his fingers rest, pushing gently on the prostate, and flicks his tongue in a rapid tease across Stiles' frenulum, exposed between his thighs, and Stiles groans and growls and makes noises that don't sound at all human, struggles as if to get away from all the sensation; and Derek keeps pushing him, using his fingers and his tongue, focusing on the most delicate and sensitive parts of him, until, with a shout, Stiles comes, pulsing in waves that Derek can practically *see* rippling through his entire body, ass clenching rhythmically around the intrusion of his fingers and cock leaving a mess that Derek only half consumes, the remainder dribbling down to soil the sheets.

Derek pulls back, wipes the slobbery mix on his cheeks and jaw onto the pinkened cheeks of Stiles' ass, pulls his fingers out, and gets the lube again.

"I don't have a condom," he says, still breathless. "I can't get any human STI, and you can't get pregnant, but you can always—"

"Just fuck me," Stiles slurs, sounding less demanding and more lazy now that he's sunk into post-orgasmic endorphins. "I know that. Don't need a condom. Just. You promised. The tip."

Fuck, yes, Derek's so hot at just the thought, and the Domspace he's falling into is oddly more about controlling *himself* than it's about controlling Stiles: Stiles is essentially immobilized, there isn't much he can do but whine and plead, which is what Derek *wants*, and the tight rein he has on himself is... invigorating... all the things he must not do: don't throw Stiles around, yank him to his knees, bury himself in that tight, hot, *willing* body. And Stiles would love it, Derek knows this, and he wouldn't feel any pain, Derek could take care of that, but it might damage him, and Derek has control, he *has control*, and that makes each action guarded, brighter, more deliberate and more intense. Dominance fills him like the sharp, bright rush of caffeine, or the dizzying effervescence of a swelling cock.

He grabs the pillow that Stiles is no longer using, cheek instead resting on the ropes that criss-cross his arms. When he lifts Stiles' hips to shove the pillow underneath them, he gets a discontented grunt, and Stiles says, "Wait, wait. My pillow. It'll get all dirty..."

Derek rolls his eyes, but sweeps his discarded shirt off the floor next to the bed and spreads it out over the pillow before tucking it under Stiles, who wiggles around for a minute to get situated before relaxing again.

"Gonna fuck you now –" Derek breathes into Stiles shoulder, and then pulls away just to watch the flush creep from his ears to his neck and down his back until it reaches his shoulderblades. The sun finds a chink in the overcast sky and for a moment, before it vanishes once more, Stiles is painted warm, in luminous gold and cream and soft copper, and Derek *salivates*.

He makes himself slow down (dammit, he's edging *himself*, what even). Reapplies lube, uses his tongue and his fingers until Stiles is honeyed and undulating, until Derek's nose stings with the piquancy of his desire. And now, it is time. Derek lies on him, supports his weight carefully, and guides the head of his cock to Stiles' hole and slowly, *slowly*, works in the tip, jesus, feels so good, and Stiles just shivers and shivers under him, moans and gasps, and his skin is hot with the rising blood underneath, sweat warm between his back and Derek's chest, and he ducks his head, clenches his teeth around the ropes Derek put on his arms.

He parts. He opens to Derek's advance, and the flared head pops in and they both freeze, breathing harshly, a suspended moment; and then Stiles moves, he moans and he shudders and he pushes his butt back towards Derek, trying to get him further in. But Derek growls. He leans back, and smacks the as-yet-unsmacked side of Stiles' ass, a sharp sound in the room, and Stiles jolts and whines and the smell of precome is sharp, drifting in heavy little eddies through the air.

"*Don't move,*" Derek commands, Dom voice, and then watches as muscles go limp, untensing Stiles' shoulders, his neck, his jaw, and the strangling crush of his sphincter loosens as well, and then Derek croons soft things to him, pulsing without moving at all, calls him *baby* and *sweetheart* and *mine*, calls him *beautiful* and *perfect*, strokes his skin and massages his back and holds his hips rigidly still and calls him *good* and *obedient* and *gorgeous*. They are like a rock in the surf, with waves crashing on and around them, with sand ever-shifting and footing uncertain. The whole world rolls and tosses and wavers, except for the two of them, frozen but for Derek's wandering hands and soft, sighing words.

Stiles might breathe *Please*. He might pull against his bonds. He might try to twist and thrust under Derek's weight. He might. But he also might be floating in Derek's strength and determination, in his focus and concentration, in the implacable weight of him bearing down, in the inexorable stretch where Derek has enclosed part of himself inside Stiles' body.

Everything is timeless, but Derek moves eventually, tiny thrusts, pulsing, dragging the flared rim of his cock back and through and through again. He leans down, covering Stiles as gently as he can, careful for any sign of discomfort, but Stiles only goes more jellied beneath him the more weight he applies, huffing out each breath.

"More," Stiles gasps, pushing with his toes, because that's all he can move. "Alpha. Sir. More—"

But Derek refuses, teasing, just slides the tip in and out, feverishly babbles about how it'll be when it's the whole length, when it's the knot, strains for control and achieves it, fed on the shaking of the lean body stretched under his own. He mouths at Stiles' nape, tells Stiles between sucking kisses what the bond bite means, presses his teeth tauntingly between shoulder and neck, just below

the collar, and Stiles whispers *Yes, yes, please*, into his arms, twists so that Derek will kiss him, eyes open and blind, glassy with pleasure and submission.

When Derek's body is so taut he can hardly hold back, he reaches under Stiles, cupping his hand around his cock, starts squeezing with each abortive thrust of his hips; a stroke and a twist, and Stiles comes for the second time, crying out – and Derek watches his face, dewed with sweat and red with exertion, crimson lips shining and open and then he plants his hands on the mattress, twists them in the sheets and roars out his own orgasm, eyes shut tight, everything in him focused on the feeling of heat and pleasure, liquid lightning passing between them, feels the hot spread of it around the head of his cock as it pools inside Stiles' body.

After a long while of panting, bodies crushed together, caught in gravity and repletion, Derek slides down Stiles back, pulls apart the globes of his ass to watch the languid twitch of his hole, the slow slide of come dripping out, and then he presses his face in and laps it up, pushes it in with his tongue and sucks it back out, licks Stiles clean and worms his hand between his legs to toy with his soft cock until it stiffens, until Stiles comes again with a shuddering sigh, Derek's tongue in his ass, Derek's hand on his cock, Derek's weight between his legs and his scent everywhere.

Just the tip. Huh. Derek would call it a success.

Chapter End Notes

(Here are a [couple visuals](#) if you want some graphic porn to aid your imagination. Not Sterek lookalikes, sadly, or I'd have used it here.)

ETA: TealTigress asked, 'Does this mean Stiles doesn't have rape trauma anymore?' Which is a great question, and I'd like to clarify for all of you, in case you were wondering:

Here's how I see (and have experienced) rape trauma: it's something that comes and goes. Like, there are bad days, of course, and they may even be most days -- but sometimes you can be in a safe place, and feeling good, and maybe your trauma will never rear its ugly head. But there are triggers that will set you off even if you ARE in a safe place. We've seen multiple times that Stiles' main trigger is a penis near his face, period, and occasionally even just seeing one. (It would be reasonable to assume that he has a trigger about anything going in his ass, because of the Sharpie incident... but Derek's had fingers in Stiles' ass in pretty much every sexual encounter they've had, and it hasn't been a problem so far.)

For this entire scene, Stiles never sees Derek's erection (although he feels it against his body, of course) because Derek takes off his underpants after Stiles is on his stomach; and Stiles never even touches Derek... couldn't even if he wanted to, because his hands are tied, which protects him from even having to make that choice (although he got an opportunity to handle Derek's erection in a safe space in Chapter 39).

So Stiles wakes up warm and cuddly, is a little stoned on endorphins, feeling horny and secure, plus no triggers. I think it would have been a completely different situation if Derek had indicated that he wanted a blowjob (which he never has and has actually specifically reassured Stiles that he won't). Within those parameters, I just wanted our boys to have some lovely hot sex. And you know. Just the tip. That trope always gets me ;)

The Argent's Full House aka Denouement

Chapter Notes

This is the penultimate chapter, y'all!!! And I have written the last sentence of the last chapter, and all that remains is its editing and posting, and WOW, I don't even know what to do with myself.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When they arrive at the Argents', it's a full house. Before Chris even opens the door all the way, Stiles can sniff out his father, Melissa, Scott, the young Alpha girl (whose name he's already forgotten) and Allison. Somewhat fainter (probably behind closed doors) are the Willises and the two hunters. Stiles and Derek are gestured to a spacious den containing the kids, while Melissa and Dad can be heard in the kitchen talking about coffee over the screech of what has to be an espresso machine.

"Stiles!" Scott leaps up and runs at him, and Stiles cannot help but flinch away, post-trauma muscle memory overshadowing the years of history they have.

Derek checks Scott with a palm on his chest, but he doesn't look too worried. "*Slow down,*" he says gruffly.

Scott stops so abruptly he teeters on his toes, and he looks up at Stiles from under his lashes, abashed, making the most of penitent, warm brown eyes. His body language practically screams *aw, shucks*, and Stiles has to laugh, then, reaching out to pull him into a tight hug, thumping him fondly on the back.

"Heeey, buddy," he says into Scott's shoulder. "Sorry I'm jumpy—"

"No, man, no! You. You have every reason to be. Dude, *I'm* sorry, jesus, really, so sorry—"

Stiles shakes his head and clutches Scott tighter still, nose buried in a kind of dank cotton T-shirt, but still pleasingly redolent of *Scott*, with his Axe deodorant and the dusty-burlap smell of his house. "No. Scott: I'm sorry this happened to you."

Scott shrugs and steps back. "Naw, buddy. That's not your fault. Last night, I spent a long time talking to Mr. Argent and Bertie, here, and... . It's not that bad. I mean. Look!" He lifts his shirt and displays an abdomen that Stiles could swear didn't use to be quite so ripped (or indeed, had any definition whatsoever). "Nothing! No cuts, nothing. And, I'm breathing better. And *dude*... I can turn into a wolf! I mean, not yet, but with some practice, I should be able to, and—"

Stiles blinks at his friend. Scott is... taking this really well. Like, *super-well*. Where are the psychological scars from his ordeal? It's a little, *insulting*, somehow. That Scott's been gone for a couple of days, been tortured, hung on the goddam fence, and now he's smiling and talking about the bright side. Well, it actually totally fits Scott's happy-go-lucky approach to life, but somehow it shapes a stark (and unflattering) contrast to Stiles, and his slow, slogging recovery.

Stiles tightens his lips and straps those feelings down. They don't matter, and he needs to be supportive of his friend. "Yeah, man. You'll be an awesome wolf, for sure."

Scott looks around the room, dodgy, and then leans close to whisper into Stiles' ear (as if half the room couldn't hear him clear as a bell), "Duuuude. I'll be able to lick my own dick, man."

Stiles can't help it. He starts snorting, because, yeah, *it's true*, and then he and Scott are falling on each other laughing, and Stiles keeps choking on his own spit, and then Scott pulls back and wrinkles his nose, giving Stiles a *look*, and checking between him and Derek, and Stiles laughs even harder, because hey, he doesn't *have* to lick his own dick, so he digs a sharp elbow into Scott's side, who retaliates with a noogie, and, yeah, the world is gonna be okay.

When they can breathe once again, everyone is seated around the room, Derek and the young Alpha Domme separated by Stiles and Scott, Allison perched on an ottoman and the three adults on a facing sofa. Derek leans forward, saying "Alpha McLeod—"

The girl makes a face. "Ugh, *please*. Call me Bertie."

Derek nods, saturnine and precise. "You may call me Derek."

Derek's stiff formality makes Stiles rolls his eyes at Scott, who smirks back.

"McLeod Pack is in Nevada, right?"

The redhead looks down with a grimace and nods.

"How did they get you?"

"From school," she says. "My second is coming to get me: she should be here really soon."

"Did they. Did the hunters get your parents?" Derek asks delicately.

The girl shakes her head. "No. They. Um. They drowned last summer on a whitewater trip."

Derek's face folds into lines of sympathy. "I'm so sorry. I hadn't heard."

Stiles frowns, turning towards her and nestling his spine into Derek's warm side. "So they – the hunters – kidnapped you so that... you could bite Scott?"

John rolls his eyes at his son. "They kidnapped her so she could bite *Cecily*. Scott was intended as a demonstration."

Scott nods, and a kind of sick smell emanates from him. "Yeah. They. Not in front of Cecily, but her dad. They were showing him how I could. Heal."

Stiles leans his head onto Scott's shoulder. "Aw, man."

Scott shakes his head and pats Stiles' knee. "Not your fault, boo."

"Where are they now? Cecily and... everyone?"

John leans forward. "The hunters are in Chris's basement, they're secure. So are the Willises, in a separate room that, you know, Cecily could access. We decided it'd be safer here than at Alan's."

Stiles nods. He knew that, actually: his father had told Derek the night before that they'd all be at the Argent house because it had better security in addition to "containment facilities" and resources to look after Scott and Bertie, if need be. Derek had passed that info along, but Stiles had been otherwise occupied at the time with bleeding and confusion, so it hadn't really penetrated.

"Have you talked to them?" Stiles isn't actually sure whether his question refers to the hunters or the Willises.

Chris smiles, and his eyes go very cold and gray, like an arctic sea. "We've talked enough with the hunters. There are protocols in place for the kind of stuff they pulled. They'll be taken care of. There's a team coming later today."

John's eyebrows frown and his lips tighten at the corners, but he doesn't say anything, which really, kind of blows Stiles' mind. Because his dad has dedicated his whole *life* to supporting and following the law, and this is a *huge* deviation. But also, he gets it, that John is trapped between Scylla and Charybdis, because how could he *possibly* bring these two to jail, when they know so much damaging stuff about his son and others that he cares about? It's a shitty position, and Chris seems to know about it, as he settles back into the sofa, angling towards John slightly, letting his shoulder dip under John's outstretched arm: subtle sub actions designed to calm his Dom.

"Is Cecily okay?" Stiles asks, because he *likes* her, and god, he hopes she didn't know anything about this.

"Her father said she'd be alright for the night."

Melissa stirs and frowns. "He gave her enough sedatives to take out someone half again her weight. I've checked on her every couple of hours since we got here. She's just sleeping."

Stiles feels weird telling Melissa thank you for taking care of the people who'd had her son kidnapped, tormented and abused, and then forcibly turned into a werewolf. But. Cecily. So, "Thank you."

Melissa smiles a little sadly. "She's just a kid. And she has a heavy burden."

Stiles takes a moment to filter through all the different people sounds in the house, a concatenation of heartbeats and breaths and shuffling movement. He can pick out the heartbeat that most likely belongs to Cecily: a light flutter, albeit slow, that seems perched on the earth as delicately as her corporeal form. The slow, strong one nearby must be Mr. Willis. They are shuffling and moving around, so Stiles says, "They're up now. Can we. Can we talk to them?"

Derek growls, doesn't even pretend to stifle it, and his eyes glow red with his smoldering fury.

Stiles leans into him further, drawing comfort from his strength and resolve. He's safe here, with his Alpha, his father, two skilled and *ethical* hunters, his best friend and his second mom. And Bertie. Who, at the very least, doesn't come across as dangerous. He thinks she's a couple of years younger than he is, jesus, barely out of middle school. He should count his own lucky stars.

Chris nods and rises, John behind him, and they leave to fetch the father and daughter who precipitated the whole shitstorm of the last months. They return some 20 minutes later, Chris in the lead, followed by Mr. Willis pushing Cecily, under the watchful eye of the Sheriff. Chris moves to the side, unsubtly keeping the pair in view, and kind of gestures with a hand. "Cecily and Dafydd Willis," he announces, as if anyone didn't know.

Stiles stands at once, but then stalls, not sure what to say. *Hi, we were worried about you, by the way, did you plan on kidnapping and mutilating my friend?* Yeah, maybe not. Cecily looks very small in her chair, and very tired, her eyes dull and complexion a little gray.

Her father stands behind her, easily the tallest man in the room. His skin is dark, and shaded with a two-day scruff around a short goatee. He looks in his mid-forties, although there is hardly any silver in his short-cropped hair. His eyes are red-rimmed, whether from fatigue or a night spent leaking tears (which Stiles nastily *hopes* is the case) giving an air of defeat to a face that looks like it'd normally be stern at worst and smiling at best. He's got his hands on Cecily's shoulders, one thumb rubbing gently at the side of her neck slowly rolling the gold chain of her collar up and down.

There's a long, awkward silence, with everyone just kind of staring around, because how do you even *start* a conversation like this?

"I'm sorry," Cecily finally blurts out, tongue seeming to stumble in her soft, accented voice. "I'm so sorry." She rolls her lips in and pinches them tight as tears form and drip unheeded down her cheeks. "I swear I had no idea—"

The man behind her clears his throat. "This was. *My fault*," he says quietly, switching his gaze between Scott and Bertie. He looks stricken. "I was... chasing a dream. A promise. And I never examined it to see—" He drops his head, pulls his thumb and forefinger across his eyes. "I didn't want to think too hard about it. That it was too good to be true."

"*Tad*," Cecily puts her hand on top of his, but doesn't look up at him. "He thought he was buying a cure for me," she says after a moment. "He didn't know what that meant. That it would mean *hurting* other people."

Dafydd keeps his hand in front of his mouth, his eyes fixed on Scott and Bertie. "*Children*," he says. "I had no *idea* they'd be. Taking and torturing *children*."

Derek looks at Chris one eloquent eyebrow cocked. He's been growling softly, vibrating against Stiles, who can feel his protective outrage through his skin as well as through the bond. "Start from the beginning," he commands impatiently. "How the hell would this even *start*?" Because *why*, really, *why*? What could be worth wrecking the lives of so many people?

John moves in further from the doorway, and everyone lifts and resettles, like a startled flock of birds, until eventually Cecily is parked next to the facing sofa, her father seated next to her, Melissa on his other side while John and Chris remain standing.

Dafydd leans forward, propping his elbows on his knees, hands dangling loosely between them. "Cecily has a demyelinating neuropathy," he says. "It started after a fever about two years ago. There's no cure, and not any medicines they know of that can control it. So she's become progressively weaker, and the doctors predict that it's only six months or a year until the nerves leading to her heart and lungs begin to fail, and then—"

Cecily reaches over and pats his leg, and her father grabs her hand and holds tight. "I lost her mother a long time ago, and. I've been fighting as hard as I can, I. Every specialist, all over the world, and no one—" he swallows hard. "A few months ago I heard about a man who cured his cancer, and started tracking that down, until I finally was put in touch with Laxmi Baqri. She explained that the cure was actually the bite of a supernatural creature, which conferred both healing and immunity to disease. She had documentation and, well, it was never very much proof,

but I'd exhausted everything else. I have money, plenty of it, and what use is it if I ... don't have my Cecily?"

He shakes his head slowly, eyes back on the floor, but it still easy to read heartbreak in every line of his body. "I didn't ask because I didn't *want* to know. They kept putting us off, but finally we were given a time and place to meet to get this bite, to meet the creature. When we got there, to that place last night. You have to know, I didn't plan *any* of that."

"But you were going to let it happen anyway," Derek interrupts bluntly. "You saw Scott, you saw Bertie; and you didn't call the police, you didn't ask them to stop. You were *still going to go through with it.*"

Dafydd looks up, meets Derek's contemptuous gaze head on, and nods. "She's my daughter," he whispers. "*I'd burn down the world if it would save her.*"

Stiles leans in, pressing his shoulder into Derek's side. From his perspective, it's a fair point, because what wouldn't Stiles do for someone he dearly loves? What atrocities might he commit to protect his father, or to have saved his mother? And then he looks at Scott and Bertie, thinks of the permanent scars, both physical and psychological, that they and he and Derek will bear, and he also knows that *nothing* is worth that price.

It's a conundrum without a solution: there's no clear answer, this isn't black and white. People do horrendous things with only the purest intentions. He could expand from there. What horrors are in Laxmi's past that the maiming and murder of werewolves makes sense to her? He bets she has a baby niece or something that she loves more than anything else in the world: even the most callus are capable of some degree of love and loyalty.

It's exhausting to think of things like this, how everyone might have a reason, and how some people are just unlucky enough to get in the way. Derek had slaughtered Rudy and Gunner without a flicker of remorse, because *they deserved it.* But what ultimate power decides who deserves what?

It's too big a problem to grasp, he thinks. Like contemplation of the universe, it's simply too big, too unwieldy, too many moving parts. Stiles has trouble reconciling the two in his head: the man who financed his abduction and abuse, however unwittingly, and his sweet daughter, who wakes every morning knowing her own death is one day closer.

Now, Laxmi and Baron he'd cheerfully pitch off a cliff into a volcano full of... lava-sharks. But.

He'll have to make his judgements in small pieces, based on what is in front of him at the time. And here are the Willises, a tiny family of two, just like Stiles and his dad. Mr. Willis had thought he was buying a cure, and didn't *want* to know any details, in case the knowing of them might render the cure a price he was too moral to pay.

Stiles... couldn't say he wouldn't do the same in a similar situation.

These thoughts eventually congeal in the midst of another awkward pause, and Stiles pushes his acceptance and forgiveness through the bond to Derek. Because Derek. Derek would kill for his family, too. Dafydd had seen a chance and he'd leapt at it, but now it had fallen through. The resignation and sorrow in his face is palpable. If he could die in place of his daughter, he'd do it in a heartbeat, that much is clear.

Derek sighs and relaxes suddenly, accepting Stiles' non-verbal input through their bond. "Do you know what kind of bite they were talking about and why it would have worked?"

Mr. Willis looks at Derek with some surprise: he obviously doesn't know who his is or what his role is – he doesn't seem to realize he's in a room full of werewolves and hunters, although he surely knows about Scott and Bertie at this point. "Not really. I knew it was a long shot, but like I said, I could afford to gamble. It's. What they showed me last night was, erm, that these two surely aren't human."

Derek shakes his head, and Stiles isn't looking, but he feels certain there's a rolling of the eyes as well. "They're werewolves," he says without hesitation, since most of the cat – er, wolf, heh – is already out of the bag. "Scott is a beta, Bertie is an Alpha. Only the bite of an Alpha has any effect, but do you understand what that effect *is*?"

Mr. Willis just waits, chastised, but listening intently. Stiles can hear the gradual increase of his pulse, the faint, lemony swell of hope in the air. Willis had been resigned before, but he understands that getting an explanation *means* something, something more than simple punishment or retribution, although that had perhaps been all he'd been expecting.

"The Bite essentially transmits an infection: lycanthropy," Chris contributes. "Being a werewolf is part of the package deal with the healing you were trying to buy."

Derek takes it up, "Werewolves don't get sick, and a bitten werewolf will often be cured of something chronic they had prior to the Bite. Scott just mentioned that his asthma appears to be gone. Another of my betas had epilepsy before she was turned. *But*," he straightens up and shifts his intent focus to Cecily, "it's *risky*. The Bite will either make you a werewolf or it will kill you. Gruesomely. There's no middle ground."

Stiles softly clears his throat, because, hey, what's a fennec fox, then. Derek huffs and knocks his knee into Stiles' hard enough to indicate that he thinks quibbling over what variety of canid results from the Bite is moot in this particular conversation. Fine, then.

"One of the reasons I bit Erica and took her into my pack was because of her epilepsy, actually, which had gotten so bad they weren't sure how long she'd survive. It was... a risk worth taking. Stiles, here, was bit after being so beaten and injured by your employees," here Derek gives Dafydd a narrow-eyed, serial-killer glare, "that he would doubtless have died of those injuries within a day or two if he hadn't turned."

"You need to know that, once you're a werewolf, you will be a part of a pack. Forever. *Not* joining a pack means that you'll become an omega wolf: you'll lose control and become a danger to yourself and others. The kind of danger that must be *killed* in order to be stopped. So this is a life-changing decision: you'll become a wolf, you'll suddenly have a new family, become a part of hierarchy that you can't ever leave. Think about that."

There's knocking at the door, then, and the Willises retreat – presumably to 'think about that' – and Erica, Boyd and Isaac enter, full of energy and worry, and then there's a lot of scent marking and physical reassurance in which most of the pack mills around in the middle of the room and Bertie sits, wide-eyed and quiet, on the sofa with Scott and Allison.

"Your pack is much larger than I'd thought," Bertie says thoughtfully, once they'd settled back down. Stiles looks around. Derek and his betas make four. Stiles and *his* 'pack' add four more... six if you count the Argents, who are at a minimum within *dating* distance of being pack. A pack

of ten. He smiles a little, but it drops as Bertie continues, “After your. I mean. When your first pack got. Um.”

Derek shows her some mercy as she flounders. “When my family died, you mean.” His glance flickers up to Chris, face eerily smooth, before returning his attention to Bertie. “I was alone, for a while, and then it was just the four of us,” he gestures at the betas, “until just recently.”

Bertie looks a little ashamed. “I was still pretty much a baby,” she mumbles. “But I’m sorry we didn’t help you then.”

Derek shakes his head. “Don’t worry about it,” he says. He loops an arm around Stiles’ waist and pulls him closer. “What about *you*? You’ve only been Alpha for a couple of months, right? Do *you* need help?”

Bertie pulls her long red hair over one shoulder and toys with the end of it before shaking her head. “No. It’s really weird. I mean, *you* must know how strange it is, right? When they die, and the power hits you. That... *hurts*, and, it takes a long time to get used to it. But. My pack is cool, they’re patient. Even though I’m not lucky enough to have a mate who’s also a spark and an Emissary,” she nudges Stiles in the side and winks. “We’re fine, really. I mean, once my auntie gets me back to them.” She turns to smile at Scott. “There’s a place for you there.”

Scott darts a frantic glance at Stiles, sucking in a sharp breath. Before Stiles can say anything, though, Derek is shaking his head. “I’ll take him,” he says. “Scott belongs here, and anyway, he was already part of Stiles’ pack.”

Bertie nods, unsurprised. “You want to do it now?”

Derek glances over to Chris, who is leaning against a wall next to John. Chris flips his hand, which must mean go ahead, because Derek stands up, nudges the coffee table aside, and says, “Scott, do you wish to join the... Hale-Stilinski pack?”

(Stiles almost chokes on his tongue at that name, because. Because he’s just a *sub*, and this is an probation that is *never* granted to subs. But. His Dom has proven again and again that Stiles’ preconceptions have been narrow and bigoted, and this. This is wonderful. He beams, grinning at Derek, who smiles faintly back at him, feeling the rush of Stiles’ pride and adoration through their bond.)

Scott bites his lip and Stiles leans over to give him a hug. “Course you do,” he grumbles quietly into Scott’s shoulder. “Come on, bro. Make it official. Join the family.” He snickers, “Marry us.”

Allison gives Scott an encouraging squeeze from the other side, and a little push, until he’s standing in front of Derek.

Scott swallows hard, and shoves both hands into his pockets. “Okay. Yeah. Please. What do I do?”

Derek puts a hand on the back of Scott’s neck. Scott’s looking down at their feet, but Derek still focuses on his face. “Right now, you’re Bertie’s beta, because she’s the one who bit you. Last night, when you went after Stiles, I stopped you, and that helped your transfer, but making it official will settle all of us.”

“So. What does that mean?” Scott asks nervously.

“Get on your knees. I’ll roar, and you submit –”

“But I’m a Dom –”

Derek doesn’t roll his eyes, but Stiles can tell he wants to. “So is Boyd. This isn’t about your D/s designation. It’s about pack hierarchy. To be a part of the pack, you must submit to me as Alpha. Can you do that?”

Scott shifts, looking distinctly uncomfortable, but Stiles flicks his fingers when Scott looks at him – *go on, dude, do it, let’s skip to the honeymoon.* Allison smiles reassuringly, and Melissa, leaning against the grown-up wall with the others, clasps her hands in front of her and nods. So Scott slowly kneels.

Bertie rises, and stands behind Scott. She puts both hands on his shoulders, gives them a little squeeze, and then steps back. Derek takes a deep breath, eyes red, partially shifted into beta form, and lets loose a resounding roar. The blast of sound is prolonged, rising to a rattling, bass-level crescendo, dipping into a series of rumbling growls and then rising again into a sound more reminiscent of a lion or a bear than a wolf.

Scott drops even lower, unable to help his response, and then whimpers and turns his head, baring his throat. His eyes flash gold, darting up to meet Alpha red before dropping submissively. Derek roars again, and Scott whimpers once more before his voice lifts into a rather silly howl. That sets the rest of them off, Erica and Stiles starting first. Stiles slides to his own knees, grabbing Scott by the arm and grinning at him before lifting his face, eyes black, to howl.

There’s a deafening, joyful racket in the room, and everyone is blinking, breathless and smiling when they finally settle down. The Willises have come to peer through the doorway, John is grumbling about the department getting calls for noise complaints, and all the pack is clustered around Derek and Stiles, petting their newest member, who looks dazed, but happy.

Later, when the adults have moved into the ‘formal living room’ and the kids are all hopped up on the fancy coffees Allison’s been showing off (except for Stiles: since caffeine kind of puts him to sleep, he’s leaning his head on Derek’s shoulder and watching everyone laugh and talk), Cecily shyly asks if someone might demonstrate the werewolf transformation. There’s an immediate flurry of clothes, and far too much skin for such a gathering. Erica is the first to be naked, and she smirks at Cecily before undergoing the grind-and-pop of the change. Scott and Allison whoop and egg everyone on. Derek steps behind the sofa before stripping off his shirt, and Stiles just transforms right there in his clothes before fighting his way out of them.

“Bloody hell,” Cecily breathes, staring at the wolves. “This is *incredible*.” And then she squeals when Stiles scrambles out from under his shirt, and Bertie, who hasn’t changed, turns to Derek, who is still human, and says, “What—”

Cecily holds her arm out to Allison and says, breathless, “Help me down, help me get down—” And Allison holds her steady as she lurches forward and then sinks to the floor, wiggling to get her back against the sofa. She extends her hand to Stiles, who comes right forward, ears alert and eyes bright, sharp little muzzle open in a canid grin. “Stiles!” she whispers, awed. “You’re so tiny!”

Stiles, shameless, steps right up and bumps his head under her palm, demanding ear scratches, and she laughs, delighted, and pets him clumsily while she goggles around the room at the three beta wolves. Erica and Isaac are tusseling, and Boyd watches from the sidelines with a faintly superior attitude.

“Holy shit,” Scott says. “Wait. Derek, how do I—”

And Derek, standing shirtless behind the sofa, says, “It’ll take a little time, Scott, before you can do it on your own.”

And Cecily stares over at Derek, blushing furiously, and says, “Wait. Derek. *Derek*. Ohmygod, you’re Stiles’ *dog*, aren’t you?” Instead of answering, Derek drops his pants and shifts, leaping four-footed over the sofa to land in front of Cecily and Stiles, and Cecily jerks back with a laughing shriek, “*Derek*, I can’t believe it. Hullo.”

Bertie repeats, incredulous, “Stiles’ *dog*??”

And now Cecily is surrounded by a pack of four enormous wolves and one tiny fox, and Scott uninhibitedly throws himself into the middle of it, laughing and wrestling with Boyd.

The adults peek around the door at all the ruckus, and then have to come in, because they’ve never seen anything like this, and Davydd sinks to his knees beside his daughter, who looks up at him, laughing, Stiles caught up in one arm and the other draped around Derek’s neck, and Stiles is momentarily distracted by salinity, as the man’s eyes fill with tears. “Look, *Dadi*, look at them, isn’t this amazing? This is *Stiles*, and *Derek*, and *Boyd* and *Isaac* and *Erica*,” she points to each wolf as she introduces them and then grabs her father’s shoulder, shaking it a little. “Aren’t they *wonderful*? ”

Davydd takes a deep, shaky breath and scoops his daughter in close to his side, fingertips grazing Stiles’ ears, and when he blinks, tears track down his cheeks to get lost in stubble. “*Fy annwyl*, yes. Yes, they are... they are *beautiful*.”

Meanwhile, Bertie is asking Allison why their Spark is a fennec fox, to which Allison shrugs and says, “I guess he’s just special.”

And Scott demands a Harry Potter marathon, “*—dude*, hashtag animal transformation, amirite?!” And Bertie gets over her wariness and shifts into a lovely adolescent wolf with a reddish brown coat and Stiles immediately leaps onto her back to give her a welcoming lick, so she won’t feel left out; and then he has to bounce at everyone to do the same thing before squirming back into Cecily’s lap, stretching out to keep one paw on Derek’s muzzle where it rests on her knee. Scott and Allison put in the first movie, and Chris has the fire going, and Allison has suggested texting Lydia and her posse to come over, for the express purpose of terrifying Jackson into behaving now and forever, which is intriguing enough so that Derek nods his permission.

This might just be the best cuddle huddle Stiles has been a part of yet, with everyone he loves around him, with the two Willises embracing a new beginning, with everyone’s injuries healed.

Aw, look y'all, a happy ending! (Well, one more happy ending to come *coughs* *euphemism*)

TWO WEEKS AND WE'LL BE DONE!!!

Oh, also, I just wanted to say that I've given Cecily a condition similar to my son's. Phoenix has [CIDP](#), a progressive degenerative neuropathy involving his own immune system attacking and degrading the myelin sheath around the nerves of his peripheral nervous system. He gets regular infusion treatments of human antibodies ([IVIG](#)) which miraculously keep him walking and running and making his [music](#)... and when I say miraculous, I really mean it, as doctors still aren't positive about the exact mechanism by which it works. (So kids, go donate your plasma: they'll even pay you for it, and it might be YOUR plasma that keeps my son out of a wheelchair.)

But: I've spent a lot of the past 8 years fighting for him, getting him everything he needs to be happy and safe and mobile (he's fine, with IVIG), but if we were to stop treatment – and the insurance companies *hate* it because it costs them some \$100k/yr, and because unlike many others, my son has yet to experience any period of remission – the progression of nerve failure to eventually stop his heart and lungs is not entirely theoretical. So Davydd Willis's position is very interesting to me. *What wouldn't you do for your child?* Where do your morals stop and your instincts as a parent take over? It's not an easy answer, I don't think.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Y'all, I have some art, which I commissioned from the very talented [lenaospinka](#), who does exquisite work. (It belongs in the front - chapters 1 & 4 - but I'm putting it here as well, so that you won't miss it.) And also the lovely [faladrast](#) generously created a gorgeous banner – thank you darling! – which I've got at the end, but will also put in chapter 30. A plethora of good things, y'all! What a gratifying way to wrap this epic up.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)





Two weeks later, life has settled into a new normal. School is... more different than Stiles had ever dreamed it could be. He's got pack around all the time, they stake out their table for lunch, walk together in the halls, sit in a cluster in their classes. They look out after each other, sharing the little quotidienne joys and trials. There is no more bullying... of *anyone*, really, because once the pack became aware of what happened to Stiles, they don't allow it to happen to anyone else. Derek still comes along as a service dog, but they're discussing tapering it off. Stiles has only had a single panic attack at school since the hunter showdown, and that concluded with a fully satisfying, if surreptitious, orgasm behind the locked door of a bathroom, so in the long run, it was a win.

Lydia hangs around. She's not really a part of the group, but she's *trying*, and so are Danny and Jackson, although in a lesser way. She addresses bullying, too, and just presented a long paper on the oppression and mistreatment of male subs in their soc stud class. She's smart and interesting, and clearly has Jackson well controlled, and Stiles suddenly can't see anything in her but a Domme. And Jackson, just as clearly, is on the submissive side of neutral, and Stiles can't believe he ever thought otherwise. No wonder Jackson needed his buddies' help when he was trying to Dom Stiles.

The Willises have returned to Wales. Derek got in touch with the Satomi pack, whom he knew from childhood, and they set up an introduction to a Welsh connection. Cecily Skypes regularly with Stiles. She and her *tad* really like their local pack, and the feeling seems to be mutual. They've arranged a biting ceremony – to include both Cecily and Dafydd, who couldn't conceive of being a different species from his daughter – for the next full moon, and she's nothing but excited about it. The pack elders think that the bite won't *cure* her... but it will accelerate her healing enough to rebuild the insulation around her nerves as quickly as her body degrades it, so it

will have the same effect. Cecily still has trouble believing in her second chance, but she positively glows: her eyes, her skin, her smile. Stiles hadn't realized how... diminished she'd been when they'd met.

Davydd feels terrible about the whole clusterfuck, and really wants to use his money somehow to make up for what he did. He and the Evans Pack are going to build a foundation for troubled and needy werewolves, especially those who have been hurt by hunters. Derek's invited to open and administer a branch in the States, using Willis funds, but he's still thinking about that one. There's no hurry.

Young Bertie McLeod is recovering well. She'd been swept back to Nevada by her aunt (a fierce, tiny, middle-aged woman who cried and hugged them all and then demanded to be let loose on the hunters so she could slowly kill them). Like Cecily, Bertie regularly Skypes with Stiles, and kind of parentally checks in on Scott (which is hilarious on so many levels) and is formal and a little awed by Derek Hale because of all the history and gravitas that come with his name.

(Stiles likes the feeling that he's developing a global network of Pack allies and resources.)

Scott is enjoying being a werewolf. He's always been a tactile, friendly soul, and puppy piles make him so happy he'll practically get high off it. (Stiles does, too, though, so he can't tease.) Scott's asthma has vanished entirely, and to Jackson's disgust, he's the shiny new star of the lacrosse team (although he gets stern lectures from Derek on toning it down because this werewolf thing is *supposed to be a secret, Scott, have you learned nothing?*)

One afternoon, playing Mario Kart with Stiles, Scott leans over, bumping shoulder to shoulder, and says, "I tried it, dude."

"What?" Stiles asks, focused more on the game than the conversation.

"You know. When I was in my wolf shape." Scott says. (He's figured out how to shift in the past week. He makes a nice wolf, Stiles thinks, large, with a glossy, thick coat; but his ears give him a similarly doofy look to when he's human, flopping a bit, rendering him more frolicsome and whimsical than imposing.) Scott clears his throat, in a sulphurous wisp of embarrassment, and Stiles sets down the controller and turns, eyes narrowed.

"What?" he asks again.

"That thing, you know. Dogs can. Suck their own... *thing*. You know."

Stiles chokes on his own tongue and then spends a frozen moment just goggling at his friend before he starts rolling on the floor, howling with laughter. "You sucked your own dick?"

"Don't tell me you haven't tried," Scott huffs, and Stiles laughs harder.

"Not when I've got Derek to do it for me," he gasps, leaning up on his elbows.

"Oh my god." Scott is scandalized. "Don't tell me about that!" He pushes Stiles over again, and they wrestle for a while before coming to an eventual stop, panting and only slightly bruised.

"Hmmmm," Stiles says at last. "For the sake of scientific curiosity, I might have to—" He shifts right there, from human to fox, and then has to dig his way out of his clothes. He gives Scott a

sassy look, waggling his ludicrous ears, and making a show of seating himself, and his best friend shrieks like a banshee.

“Stiles, oh my god, *no*, nononno—”

And then, dramawolf that he is, he runs out of the house, jumps on his bike and pedals furiously to get home. Unless he’s heading to Allison’s to show her his new discovery.

And Stiles is a scientist at heart. So he tests the theory. Yep, he can definitely easily reach his own cock. It’s not nearly as satisfying as when Derek does, however.

Chris has long since vanished Laxmi and Baron to whatever hunter hell they’ve got going on. Stiles knows it bothers his father to deal with them extrajudicially, but John’s not fool enough to risk his son’s safety by letting any information escape about the supernatural in general and Stiles in particular. Chris assures them that the hunters have a Council and a Code – Stiles can hear the somewhat pretentious capitalization he applies to each word – and that those who break it pay a very steep price. Stiles isn’t sure anything short of prolonged torture followed by a gruesome death could ever be steep enough, but Chris swears that these two Code-breaking sadists are locked up and never getting out, so that will have to do.

Stiles feels safe, now, for the most part. He doesn’t have nightmares every night. His house smells like pack, Derek’s loft smells like pack, school smells like pack. Stiles is much more stable emotionally – even Mrs. Casteel the therapist agrees, happy to see him talking and smiling again.

He... feels taller, now. He can maximize the expanse between each vertebrae, savor the slender length of femur and tibia, appreciate the wide sweep of his shoulders and the long, long reach of his arms. On some days, he thinks he can touch the sky, lifted by the graceful extension of his neck, holding his head up, proud and strong. He. He’s *taking up space*: all of the space allotted to him and then some. He’s felt *small* for so long, now, and it is both a freedom and an epiphany to fill his body completely, to spill over at the seams with his energy and confidence, to catch a glimpse of his aura, shimmering with the same pale gold as his pack bonds.

It is a Saturday night, and Derek slides open the loft door, ushering Stiles inside with one hand warm on the cradle of his back. A leftovers bag dangles from his other hand, as classy as the restaurant it came from, and *this was Stiles’ first date ever*; and it was awesome. Derek was flatteringly attentive, jewel-bright eyes intent on Stiles’, listening – actually listening! – to everything he rambled on about. Stiles hadn’t felt comfortable kneeling in public, and Derek was fine with that, just tucking Stiles under his arm as they sat side by side in the booth, feeding him tidbits of this or that, thumb brushing sensually across Stiles’ lips. Tease.

Now they’re back in their den, and Stiles suddenly feels more breathless than what the walk upstairs can account for. He knows Derek can smell his anticipation and arousal – lively anise and

sweet syrup – as well as the dissonant soapy overlay of trepidation. Stiles isn’t sure if he resents or is grateful for the way his emotions are broadcast as smells that can be so easily discerned: he is continually laid bare.

He and Derek have had The Contract Talk (his father had, embarrassingly, insisted) and filled out their checklist of kinks and boundaries. Stiles had been deeply ashamed of how many things he wanted to avoid, how many kinks made him shudder with revulsion or fear, how many stupid, traumatized limits he had. But Derek was a bulwark here, as everywhere else.

“I can hear it when you lie,” he’d gently reminded Stiles. “I can smell it when you’re nervous. So please. Stiles, *please*. Be truthful. Be *yourself*, okay? I’m not expecting anything, and I certainly don’t want you to be some kind of stereotype—” he had stopped there for a moment, and then his solemn eyes lit up, mouth twitching into an almost-smile, and he reached up to stroke the healed skin under Stiles’ velvet collar. “I chose you because you break every stereotype conceivable,” he murmured. “And always in the best way, in ways I’d never even considered. So just. Be yourself, Stiles. That’s what I want.”

And Stiles had been bolstered enough to go through, marking out *No* next to Abrasion, Branding, Beating, Blow Jobs (giving), Breath Play.... And Derek remained blithely unconcerned, unshaken in his conviction that they were a matched pair.

Tonight they will scene. They planned it beforehand, and dinner had just been a little prelude, a warm-up, with Derek staring at him, feeding him, touching his hands, his waist, his neck – intoxicating Stiles through the *attention* being paid to him. It was. Well. Stiles is just *so easy* for Derek, really.

“Go upstairs.” Derek’s stubble is a jolting contrast to the warm velvet collar, and his breath is hot against Stiles’ skin. The door closes behind them with a final-sounding crash and the click of two locks. “Take a... *thorough...* shower,” he bends down a little, enough to nip just below Stiles’ ear, making him shudder and push back into the solid heat of his Dom. “I’ll be there when you get out.” He slips Stiles’ collar off, then, so it won’t get wet, and gives an encouraging push. Stiles lurches ungracefully up the spiral staircase, glancing back only once to see Derek’s eyes gleaming red, tracking his every move.

Stiles washes as quickly as he possibly can. It’s the second time today, actually, since he’d showered (and furtively used an enema) late in the afternoon before Derek had picked him up for their date. But still, he washes off the smell of the restaurant, of the waiters and diners. He pinkens and sensitizes his skin with the loofah, using Derek’s scentless wash. (It’s not scentless, really: to Stiles, it evokes Derek, which is the smell he loves best.) He soaps his hands and reaches around to penetrate himself as best he can, washing that too. He scrubs between his toes and under his arms.

And then, because he’s twitchy with excitement, he turns off the water and wraps a towel around himself, stepping into the bedroom still dripping wet. The ropes that Derek had twined over and around his forearms before their dinner are now wet and uncomfortable, and Stiles shakes them to his sides, flinging droplets around in a miniature storm.

Derek sits on the end of the bed, waiting for him. He has showered as well, damp hair raked back, dressed in a soft tee and lounge pants, comfortably barefoot. His eyes gleam as they rake over Stiles, and his expression is fierce as he beckons him over. He removes the towel and, with Stiles standing naked before him, uses it to dry him off, rubbing terry cloth against his legs, gently lifting each one in turn to reach his feet, teasing along his groin, his ass, briskly buffing with a kind of

sadistic grin, until his pubic hairs are soft and curling and his cock is nearly at full mast. He dips between Stiles' buttocks and then, flipping the towel over, gestures for him to kneel and when he does, dries off his chest, his back, the damp below his ears, scrubbing at his hair until it's scarcely even damp.

He tosses the towel to the side and then gently slides the collar back on. "Mine," he whispers into Stiles' hair, and Stiles lifts his head for a brief kiss, heart too full to speak. Derek drops his gaze, sliding his hands down Stiles' shoulders to his wrists. He picks at the knots around Stiles' forearms, slowly unwinding the rope and vanishing the intricate pattern that now remains only in rough, red lines on his skin. Derek rubs over the textured indentations with his thumb, lifts Stiles' arms to his mouth to kiss along these temporary scars, and Stiles lets him take the weight of his limbs, stays lax, giving, giving, whatever Derek wants to take. He's not in subspace, not yet, but he's close enough that his fidgets have subsided, that it is an easy thing to loosen all his muscles, to let Derek move him.

They're going to knot tonight. Derek had spelled it out quite clearly, telling Stiles what to expect, and Stiles is *completely* down with that. But the knotting is... the *pièce de résistance*, as it were. Derek had said he wanted to do a different kind of knotting tonight as well: full-body binding, and Stiles is excited about the prospect.

So now Derek rises, steps over the little pile of wet rope, and goes to his closet to return with several lengths of hemp in black and red. Stiles watches his preparations from the corner of his eye, but doesn't move from his submissive kneel at the foot of the bed, enjoying the mental feedback that comes from knowing that he's in perfect form, doing precisely what his Dom desires him to do.

Derek lifts him to his feet, murmurs at him *Stand still*, and so Stiles does, mind going quiet, eyes softly focused on the floor, on Derek's bare feet, long and pale and strong – his weight is solidly in them, anchoring to the floor with each step, although he is graceful as he circles Stiles, hands hot and dry as they trail over his skin, examining him carefully, as though judging him like a piece of art.

Which he is, Stiles realizes. He's being evaluated as material by a sculptor. Derek holds his rope loosely, eyes flicking between the hemp and his subject. And then he begins. He lays the first loop gently around Stiles' neck, just under his collar. The red and black lengths twine together, but gradually, as Derek weaves and knots, the colors separate into their own pattern, enhancing the artistic effect, diamonds of red surrounded by broad stripes of black, interspersed with Stiles' own fair skin, white against the stark rope.

Stiles' stance softens as Derek weaves; he moves like seaweed under Derek's guiding touches. His breath slows, mind and body languid; his shoulders drop as he gives himself up to be Derek's canvas, the medium through which his Dom expresses his art. His cock is thick and hot, but not really erect – neither of them are – and Stiles bathes in the release of endorphins. Derek winds the rope around his chest, creates a short-waisted corset above his hips, runs lengths of rope under the crease at the top of each thigh, tickling his balls and making him gasp.

Derek stands back and looks at him, rope dangling between his hand and Stiles' body like reins, and his face smooths into happy lines. "You're so beautiful," he says, and it's so sincere that Stiles doesn't even think about doubting him. "I've never wrapped anyone as gorgeous as you. Someday, we'll do this for photographs. You were *made* for my rope." Derek's eyelashes are sooty smudges on his cheeks as he brazenly looks Stiles up and down. "You were made for *me*."

It is hard to have any insecurity, any feelings of inadequacy when your Dom has taken so much time with you, when his hands have been on your skin for so long, when his every intent and focus is yours and yours alone. Stiles lifts his head and Derek reads his mind, stepping close to embrace him, press against his mouth in a reverent kiss. Stiles opens to him, has no thought *other* than to open to him, surrendered, and Derek growls as he gathers him in more closely, tongue speaking of power and ferocity. Stiles moans against the possessive heat of it, and his knees buckle, everything in his limbic system telling him to lie down and accept whatever Derek chooses to give him.

Derek responds quickly, scooping Stiles up (like the princess he momentarily feels himself to be) and laying him on the bed. “I’m not done yet,” he says, smug, and then lifts Stiles’ knees, pushing his heels up against his ass, and begins to bind each leg, calf to thigh, so that he can no longer straighten them out. Stiles watches the pattern emerge, and now the colors have separated, red on his inner thigh and black along the outer flank. When Derek reaches his ankles, Stiles drops his head to the pillow, staring at the ceiling, and just basks in it - the strength and skill in Derek’s hands, his ardent absorption as he binds Stiles’ feet together.

“You’re so amazing,” he says as he works. “So still and... *pliant*... and so easy to work with, Stiles. You respond beautifully, and your skin is exquisite. I love the shape of your body.” He leans down and kisses the swaths of skin exposed between the hemp, bites at the rope, licks at Stiles’ inner thighs until Stiles is gasping and pushing himself towards Derek’s hot mouth. “How long you are. How strong. You’re *bewitching*.¹”

Derek’s work has taken some forty minutes, and Stiles had softened, mind gently drifting, more occupied with Derek and the feeling of his hands and his rope than with sex. Derek sits back on his heels and watches Stiles solemnly. “Touch yourself, now, Stiles. I want to see that. Your hand, your fingers, getting yourself hard.”

Stiles’ mouth is open, he can feel it, graceless, like he is stunned or vacant. But that is an incidental thing, the rest of his world is made up of Derek, nothing but Derek, looming between his knees, all heavy shoulders and sharp-edged jaw and smouldering eyes. He’s like a god – proud of his creation – and Stiles responds to that, feels newly made, moulded out of warm flesh, shaped to Derek’s command, filled in with blood and lust and devotion as Derek colored him in within the lines of his rope.

Stiles doesn’t hesitate to grab himself, half-hard just from the order. He looks down his body, at the red lines criss-crossing his arms, at the way they’re lying on top of the rope corset, at the darkening tip of his cock as he squeezes the base. Derek makes an encouraging noise, leaning forward, hands stroking up and down the ropes around his thighs. This is easy, the easiest command he’s ever been asked to follow, and Stiles jerks and pulls at himself, biting his lip, staring at his Dom, giving him this, every part of Stiles he might want.

“Very good,” Derek murmurs, almost more of an atmospheric susurrus than anything with meaning, Stiles’ focus is so intent on heat and arousal and the implacable presence of his Dom. “Look at you, you stunning creature. Slow down a little, now, be gentle Stiles, it’s not a race.”

Stiles moans and squirms, tries to push his heels away from his buttocks, and cannot; his movement just intensifies the cut of the rope which prevents him, and it makes him *burn*, and now, now his cock is fully in the game, and his blood rushes in from his extremities, exhilarating under his skin, flowing through his gut and into his penis like filings to a very strong magnet, and the sides of his fingers shine with a glaze of precome.

Derek has left little windows at his nipples, and moves upward to suck at them, using his teeth, and Stiles tangles his free hand in Derek's hair, holding on tight, pushing him close and then pulling him away when the sensation gets overwhelming.

"Derek, Derek, Derek," Stiles mutters, incogitant, not listening to himself but to the bits of praise Derek huffs out whenever he lifts his mouth from Stiles' skin. He works his way upwards, until his hands brace Stiles' head, thumbs at the hinges of his jaw, holding his mouth open for the steady invasion of Derek's tongue, and Stiles *melts* with it, pushing himself up into Derek, the weight of him pressing ropes to carve into Stiles' skin, all that massive strength cradled between his bound thighs, and *gods*, it's perfection.

"Stop, now."

Stiles *whines*, he's close, he's so close, he must be bright red, his body is so hot, and this is unfair, who wants a challenge like this, arrrgh. But Derek is merciless, pulling away, holding his wrists together at his chest, gripping the base of his cock to stay the pulsing waves of orgasm before they can crest.

"Perfect," Derek says, ignoring Stiles' frustration. "Look at you, all flushed and ready." He leans forward and mouths the inside of Stiles' knee before moving up, kissing his hip below the corset, his sternum, his neck. "I like that you can stop when I ask you to, Stiles. That it's important to you to follow my orders. That makes me feel so good."

Okay, with those words, everything Stiles is or has is Derek's. Just. All of it. Anything he wants. Derek's mouth is insistent on his own, and Stiles breathes him in, tastes his lips and tongue. He grabs at Derek's shirt and pulls at it until Derek lifts himself to jerk the offending piece of clothing off, and then, before Stiles can ask for anything else, pulls back to sit on his heels.

"Knees up, baby," Derek says, and pushes on the body part in question until Stiles' knees are at his chest, bound feet hovering inches over his crotch and whoa, this is very... exposed... and he isn't too sure about it, but the fervid flush on Derek's cheeks, the gleam of his eyes, the vast expanse of his pupil reassure Stiles that whatever he may think, clearly Derek likes the picture he presents. Derek licks his lips. "Roll over, sweetheart. Like this." And then Derek flips him over, and his ass is in the air, and Stiles is balanced on his shins and shoulders, curled into an oval, cheek against the pillow.

He cannot lift himself, the way his legs are folded and tied, but it all seems to be part of Derek's vision. He holds onto the pillow under his head, twisting the cotton until it's pulled taut. The itch and scratch and pressure of the ropes is enough discomfort that it triggers the slow build-up of soothing chemicals. Being the center of Derek's potent consideration is a high all on its own.

The bed moves as Derek tosses the remainder of his clothes to the floor, and Stiles tries to catch his breath. The way his legs are positioned, his penis is in a void, thwarted for friction, and Stiles groans.

"I'm going to get you ready for my knot," Derek rasps, and without further ado, his face is *right there*, tongue first, and Stiles feels scalding breath, the sandpaper scrape of beard bristles, the wet heat of Derek's mouth, and then he's lost, spinning in a gravity-free whirlpool of sensation as Derek licks and sucks, holding his cheeks apart with rigid fingers. And Stiles moans and jerks and makes... all kinds of embarrassing and indecorous noises... hands scrabbling at the bed, the pillow, reaching back to grip Derek's wrists, which flex and strain with the effort of holding him open.

"Stiles," Derek rumbles, pulling away for a moment, "I really want to spank you now, baby, wanna see my handprint on your ass, I'll pull the pain, I'll, do you—"

"Yeah, yes, please Derek, *do it*," Stiles groans, and then there's the crack of hand on flesh. The flashing burn of pain vanishes almost immediately. It happens again, and again, and if Stiles were in his right mind, he'd wonder if this endorphin high, the opiate overload he gets when Derek removes the stimulus for its release, is something he could get addicted to, or somehow abuse. But this is why you put trust in your Dom: because Derek isn't going to hurt him, and no matter how high Stiles is floating, Derek always keeps one eye on his body, making sure it's okay, and the other on his spirit, to be sure that aspect is safe and happy too: that he can go flying without getting lost.

And... maybe this, this magical pain-drain, is 'fair' middle ground, for a sub who is terrified of pain but who loves the endorphin rush of its removal. Derek says it's okay, and Derek is his Dom, and his Alpha, and he has literally held Stiles' life in his hands, and he's never, *never* shown him anything but compassion and integrity. If Derek sanctions the use the werewolf mojo in a scene, if he presents it as a tool they can use in the bedroom, then it must be a valid option.

Derek slaps him again, his hand feels as big as a boat, and just as hard. But as he leeches the discomfort, the heat remains, so that Stiles' skin is warm and plumped, glowing and buzzing, and Derek alternates each slap with the work of his mouth, tongue pushing at Stiles' rim, fingers starting to probe, and Stiles just hisses, speechless, tries to push his hips upward just to revel in the rough limits of his bonds.

Derek switches from spit to lube, at some point, but Stiles is drifting, now, a kite bobbing on its string, dipping and diving to soar once again. Or a twig in a rushing river. His stomach swoops and lurches with phantom movement, and his eyes close against the shattering sensation of voluptuous vertigo.

Derek's fingers are inside him, *slick, hot, distensile*, and Stiles pushes and clenches in waves, and everything feels *so* good. Derek's other hand caresses his ropes, slides a finger underneath at mid-thigh, tugging at the cord just under his ass, stroking over the corset he'd created, the thin line stretching between it and Stiles' neck. Then his body is tight against Stiles' back, mouth hot on his neck, punch-drunk words clearer now, *stunning, good for me, doing so well, beautiful, taste so good, feel so good*, an inexhaustible stream of adulation pouring out whenever Derek's mouth is far enough from Stiles' skin to do anything other than hum.

And Stiles soaks it in, parched for praise and recognition, and Derek's got so many fingers stuffed inside him that he distantly wonders if he might be being fisted, the sensation is so big and wide and solid and deep, and *whoa*, yes, that's his prostate, and Stiles, who *might* be drooling at this point, cries out, doesn't even have the wherewithal to bury his dignity in the pillow, just jolts and shivers and sobs.

And then Derek's pushing inside him, inexorable. They've done this a couple of times: Derek's whole length rather than just the tip, but every time he feels gigantic inside Stiles' body, unyielding and strong and absolute, just this one relatively tiny part of him, yet still dominating Stiles completely. Derek drives in slow but steady, and Stiles whines, rolls his head from side to side, pushes his hands up against the headboard, tries to find a way to vent all the *feeling* going on, and Derek leans down and says, "Make noise, baby, I wanna hear you, I *always* wanna hear you," which is all Stiles needs to let his last bit of self restraint go.

Derek thrusts hard and fast, the slapping between their bodies vulgar and obscene, echoing like gunshots off the walls, and Stiles gurgles and gasps and shouts. His body feels bigger and bigger with each thrust, as if it might fill completely and float away. Stiles is subsumed in the *slap, slap, slap* against the lingering burn of his pinkened ass, the way his balls jerk and sway with all the force, his dick smacking his belly with each thrust.

And then Derek's fingers are in his mouth, smearing spit, fighting his tongue, daring him to close his teeth, and Stiles whimpers and whines and slurps, penetrated at both ends, and has the brief insight that he's giving this to his Dom – this breathless choking, these cut-off shouts that he can't finish because he has to gasp, because the air is forced out of his lungs with every ringing connection between their thighs. This is what his Dom wants, and this is Stiles' gift to him, it's where he's supposed to be, what he's supposed to do – lost to all but Derek's control, all inhibition gone – this is what Derek needs from him, and he can give it... he *is* giving it... and that thought makes him even dizzier, intensifies the slow-building throb in his body–

But he can't quite come, can't get his pelvis down against the bed, can't spread his legs any further, because Derek's bound his feet together, and Derek's thighs are outside his own to accommodate that, and Stiles growls his frustration, teetering on the edge of orgasm, and Derek stops sucking a giant bruise onto his shoulder to say *Yeah, baby boy, that's it*, and now here is the swelling that he'd described, the rounded bit low down on his shaft, and Stiles can feel it, larger and larger, stretching him even further, so that the straining pull of his rim starts to feel like fire, to burn, and Derek pumps a few more times, slowing down and groaning hedonistically, luxuriously circling his hips, pulling Stiles back by his own, using him like a pleasure toy, teasing him with the enormous girth of his knot before popping it inside, and Stiles can *feel* it, feel the bulbous nature of it, the stretch, the claim, the ownership–

Stiles feels vast. He feels long and... expansive. He feels like a tunnel full of stars. And Derek is the same, somehow *empyrean*, sliding through the tides of eternity that Stiles has become. Their bodies are warm and slippery, still, but the emotion filling Stiles is wide, *boundless*. Derek's knot grows larger, stretches him to the limits of his endurance and beyond, and Stiles can hear himself making animal-like noises, wordless and loud, growling and crying in an effort to release the intense physical and emotional tension. And Derek behind him, encouraging, stroking his sides, fingers tangling in his corset, hips relentless against his own, "Baby, fuck, fuck, yes, *Stiles*, I can't–"

And then Stiles is coming, it's literally the only thing he can do, it's the only pressure-valve he has, and he releases with a long-drawn wail, fingers rigid around Derek's wrists, planted on either side of his shoulders. His body jerks with each scalding pulse, he can feel the sear of it from deep inside his testicles to where it pulses from the tip, splashing against his stomach and chest and neck.

Derek roars behind him, smelling the evidence of his climax, and his massive cock twitches, jesus, it's the size of a cannon, it jerks inside him, and Stiles' eyes roll back in his head, open mouth pressed desperately against the back of Derek's hand, where it covers his own, and Derek says, "'m gonna bite you now,"

And Stiles is very nearly out of his mind, but they'd discussed this, they'd talked about it during the last week, and again during dinner, and he'd said yes, he wanted it, even stone-cold sober, and although he's anything but, now, he grinds out *Yes, yes, Derek, please, bite me, do it* and doesn't stop with the stream of pleas until Derek breathes hot on his neck and then places his teeth and *bites*, and it's fierce and bright, like a knife or a supernova, and Stiles chokes himself into silence, gasping in the ferrous efflux of blood, the subtle pungence of Derek's saliva, can feel the fangs

embedded in his skin just like that colossal cock is embedded in his ass, and Stiles is so *full* and so *overwhelmed*.

But instead of spinning out of control he's *anchored* by knot and bite and weight and Derek's unwavering drive to protect and cherish him. The bond between them is burning, lit up, a conflagration of desire and reciprocity, color and light dripping onto the bed, spilling over sheets and walls, slinking through the air and the atmosphere and joining them with the stars. Yes, yes, *dammit, please...*

Stiles doesn't *think* he passed out, but he couldn't really swear to it. When he slowly surfaces, swimming and tingling, still detached from everything in the world other than Derek and his own body, Derek is there, crooning at him quietly, hands stroking over his arms and chest, lips soft on the side of his neck. If the bite hurts, Stiles doesn't know it, so Derek must be pulling the pain.

The knot in his ass still throbs: it's a cadenced thing, and Stiles knows that this is how Derek described it as well, an extended, rhythmic stream of orgasm, filling him up, locking it in.

The ropes around his legs are gone, Derek curled up behind him, feet tangled with Stiles' down near the bottom of the bed. The rope corset is all that remains of Derek's exquisite shibari, and Stiles dreamily admires Derek's ability to function *in any manner whatsoever* at this point, especially somehow managing to untie knots *while he's still coming*, not to mention the limited mobility that comes with the pair of them being joined together at the hips.

Derek senses him rising from subspace and leans up and around, kissing him lazily, sighing into his mouth, weaving his arms through Stiles' so that they are holding hands, tight up against Stiles' chest. "I love you," Derek says, rough and hoarse, and Stiles wonders if he'd been shouting, too. He doesn't answer, it's too much trouble, just hums and lets himself float, feeling good, *good*, god, he feels so good, this is the best ever, and Derek chuckles, enjoying his floppy body and Stiles smiles, and tries to focus on his beautiful face, but it's too much trouble, everything is too much trouble.

But then Derek slides their hands down and toys with him until he's hard, and then, lo, another orgasm, and honestly, if this isn't heaven, than Stiles thinks it falls short of what's been advertised, and he tries to tell Derek so, but what comes out of his mouth is just slurred and jumbled. Derek laughs, and their bond is so bright and happy that Stiles has to squint, so Stiles counts it as a success.

They wake up the next morning on very stiff sheets, in a ravaged bed. Derek has morning breath, and so does Stiles, but really, that's a small thing compared to the pleasant burn of his muscles, the bruisey ache of his ass, the spiky heat at his neck where the bond bite slowly heals. Derek kisses him, leisurely, hands busy on his body, impudently exploring between his legs. And as Stiles spreads them to accommodate Derek's obvious goal, he leans heavily across Derek's chest, lets the partial shift overcome him to the extent that he has fangs, and bites down hard on Derek's neck.

Derek rolls his head to the side, groaning, gives Stiles more space, moving his hands up his flanks, wrapping them around his shoulders, holding him close. Just before Stiles' teeth slide in, the familiar smell of Derek inundates him: leather and humus and the sharp, clean scent of cool air. Their bond falls softly around them, a blaring light no more, not now, in the gentle morning, Stiles

watches the colors of their linkage blend, each infusing the other. He breathes through his nose, tasting Derek between his teeth and then withdraws, lapping at the small divots of blood. Derek's defining baseline odor changes, acquires notes of ginger and bergamot, combines citrus with loam, and the heat of their bodies cooks it up into something more, something smooth and rich, an aromatic affirmation of their pairing. It's quite possibly the best thing Stiles has ever smelled.

When Derek rolls him onto his back, lifts his knees and pushes inside, the catch and drag of him at the threshold of Stiles' body is a rough delight, the musky air that billows from beneath the covers as he moves is blatant and intoxicating, and Stiles can feel their bond, vivid and joyful between them as they move.

Derek licks any trace of blood from Stiles' mouth and then kisses him like he won't ever need to breathe. Stiles presses his fingers into the bond bite he left on Derek's neck, healed now into a possessive red tattoo.

It's an inopportune time to get distracted, to think about how far they've come, about where his life was two months ago versus now, about the way he lost himself and found himself again, about the partnership he'd formed and the distance he'd travelled. They'd begun in a cold, dank cell, filled with silence and fear, pain and despair – a terrified sub and a disoriented and distant Dom. And now here they are, warm and safe, Stiles has acquired a coat of fur and an energetic, if tiny, body, and a family that now includes wolves, humans and hunters. He's lost his voice and found it again, stronger than it was before. He's had his confidence and security stripped away, and now it is tempered, tenacious. And Derek had been there, to nurture him as he took each step of that journey.

Derek stares down into his eyes and grins when Stiles blinks, his attention returned. "Hello, remember me?" he questions, patient and amused. When Stiles pauses for too long, he elaborates, "I'm the man currently inside you."

And Stiles laughs out loud because, okay, he's right here in the present, now, and there is indeed a mammoth cock sliding in and out of his ass, and a beautiful, powerful man holding up the backs of his thighs. Dom. Alpha.

Derek doesn't need to worry: he could never forget Derek, no matter what activity they're engaged in. Nope.

Stiles grins and twines his fingers with Derek's, stretches his hands up above his head. Derek follows, lengthening his body along Stiles', sinuous and strapping. As Stiles' eyes slam shut, he thinks, *Sign me the fuck up, 'cause I'm never getting off this ride.*



Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all the generous and talented artists who have been inspired to work on this story: JaidenWC ([reblog](#)); themuller13 (reblog [here](#) & [here](#)); stephcaroline ([reblog](#)); faladrast ([reblog](#)); me ([reblog](#)); and lenaospinka ([reblog](#)). Also, [here](#) is a very NSFW visual of the bondage scene, if you like (it didn't have the corset, so I didn't include it above.)

Thank you to [domachenkov](#) and [themuller13](#), who patiently beta'd swaths of this story over the years.

Thanks to these three stories/authors in particular, for inspiring this nonsense: [Integral to Survival](#) by asocialfauxpas (fuzzytomato); [That Depends On How You Define Werewolf](#) by janonny; [Don't Speak](#) by fatale.

My next Sterek story is either going to be an A/b/o where desperate omega!Stiles tries to rob an armoured truck driver who turns out to not only be an Alpha, but also a werewolf (dun dun /dun!!!)... . Or it will be a fairy tale loosely drawing from *The Princess and the Goblin*, probably with Stiles as the Prince and Derek as the miner, although I haven't settled on their roles yet. So stay tuned. Meanwhile, keep reading, keep creating, keep striving for joy and peace. Thank you for joining me on this long and strange journey: it wouldn't have been the same without you.

On an unrelated topic – but one close to my heart – if you make a bookmark, leave a note! (Just remember that they’re public by default.) I often cruise the bookmarks of a story as a guide to determine whether I want to read it, and they’re only helpful when they have notes or tags. I invite you to use [my own Bookmarks](#) as an extensive Rec List: AO3 makes sorting them to find specific fandoms/pairings/tropes very easy... and if you read this story, then it’s likely we share the same taste.

I hope you enjoyed it, darlings, as much as I did. Have a lovely night and I’ll see you next time!

-Mojo

End Notes

If y'all want to rec or share this fic on tumblr, you can use [this post](#), if you'd like -- it's got some pretty art. ;)

I [tumbl](#), if you are interested in multi-fandom squee and the occassional moaning about writing woes. After some of the pics in this story, it should not come as a surprise that my blog is Not Safe for Work, especially on Fridays.

I... am not very good at responding to comments. (Mostly because I've let them pile up and now it's too overwhelming.) I just saw [this post](#) over on Tumblr about it that suggested I leave a note here so that people know how very much I ENJOY their thoughtful comments. Even if it remains unanswered. I really do love your feedback and your responses. I read them carefully and save them. But I PROCRASTINATE....

Works inspired by this one

[Fanart for Do Not Go Gentle](#) by [myrkky](#)

[Do Not Go Gentle](#) by [Faladrast AKA surfgirl1 \(AshnDustQueen\)](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!